d. 20/772

72.
Week ending
October 17,
1903.

SHORT STORIES

PRICE
1D.

"I SNATCHED THE DOCUMENT AND THE NOTES, AND, RUSHING ACROSS THE ROOM, SLAMMED THE DOOR, LOCKING IT BEHIND ME. THEN I FLED!"

(A Thrilling Incident from our New Series, which Begins To-day. See inside.)

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THE SAFE REMEDY FOR

Headache

and Neuralgia.

CURES IN TEN MINUTES

Kaputine is not a single crude drug such as has been condemned as dangerous by the Medical Press, but is composed of several approved ingredients, having the full confidence of the Medical profession. The SAFE Remedy.

Kaputine is the only preparation of its kind used in British and Foreign Hospitals and infirmaries. Proof positive of its superior and sterling qualities.

Write to KAPUTINE, Huddersfield, for Samples Free.

Packets of 18 doses 1/1½;

Samples 1d. each.

Kindly mention this paper.

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J. G. Graves' Handsome Watch Catalogue, showing hundreds of designs, is sent Post Free. Ask for No. 1 Catalogue.

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'EXPRESS' (Reg.) English Lever, 50/-

BRITISH Manufacture throughout,

Keyless or Keywinding, is the finest value ever produced. Sent on receipt of a deposit of 5/- and your promise to complete the purchase in nine more monthly instalments of 5/-. *Important Advantages offered to Cash Purchasers.*

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Mr. C. R —— writes: "Your small sample has done me more good in a week than another much advertised remedy did in 6 months."

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ESTABLISHED 1851.

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2½% DEPOSIT ACCOUNTS 2½%
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The BIRKBECK ALMANACK, with full particulars, post free.

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SPECIAL BARGAINS UNREDEEMED.

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13/6 **Gent's** magnificent 18-ct. Gold-cased **Chronograph Stop Watch**, jewelled movement, perfect timekeeper, 10 years' written warranty; also fashionable curb (pocket to pocket) double Albert same quality (stamped and guaranteed), with handsome seal attached; three together.

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14/9 **Furs.**—Magnificent Alexandra Dagmar necklet and muff; beautiful real Russian sable hair, worth 4 guineas, not been worn; sacrifice for 14 9; approval willingly.

19/6 **Genuine Italian Mandoline**, by Stridente, Naples; fine tone; 21 ribbed, real rosewood, pearl and tortoiseshell inlaid, in sadd ar-made case; approval.

8/9 **Feather Boas**; bankrupt stock; special bargains: real Ostrich Feather Boas, beautifully curly; perfectly new, in box; colours: grey and white, black and white and natural.

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7/6 **Curb Chain Bracelet**, with paddock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case.

6/9 **Brooch**; very handsome 18-carat rolled gold, 3 swallows in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls in case.

21/- **Lady's** solid gold **Keyless Watch**, jewelled in 10 rubies, beautifully engraved case, splendid time-keeper; 10 years' written warranty; week's free trial.

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9/6 **Organ Toned Melodeon**; magnificent 26/- instrument. 12-fold bellows (metal bound), 3 sets steel bronze reeds, and 4 acting stops, including Tremolo and Diapason action; rich powerful tone, perfect order.

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12/6 **Magnificent 5-row Pearl Collarette**; finest quality, mounted with four bars of lustrous Orient diamonds, in velvet-lined case.

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MRS. GEO. FULLER, *who saved her husband.*

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

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FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

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49/6 BEDDING & DRAPERY 6/- DEPOSIT 1/6 WEEKLY

This Sale contains Pair Full-sized heavy Whitney Blankets, 1 quilt, red and white, blue and white; White Honeycomb Marcella or Red Twill your choice; Pair Full-size White Twill Sheets, 2 Pillow Cases, 1 Bolster Case, 5 Toilet Mats, 1 Toilet Cover, 2 Turkish Towels, Pair Fine Lace Curtains, 1 White Table Cloth, 1 Fringed Damask Table Cover, 6 Dusters, 2 Tea Cloths—28 Articles 49/6. How to pay. Send 6/- only, we send Sale, carriage paid for approval; balance can be paid in six monthly payments of 6/-, and one of 7/6. If you pay balance on receipt, send only 38/6, saving 5/-. Address below.

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Our Gigantic Parcel contains 6 Table Knives and Forks, 6 Dessert Knives and Forks, 12 Tea Spoons, 6 Dessert Spoons, 6 Egg Spoons, 1 pair Sugar Tongs, 2 Table Spoons, 2 Mustard Spoons, and 2 Salt Spoons. We send, carriage paid, on receipt of 3s.; balance 1s. weekly.

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SHORT STORIES.

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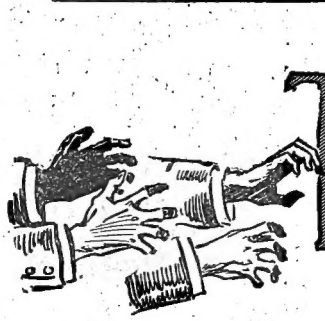

The Pursuit of Sara

It was under very ordinary conditions that I, Sara Gillespie, entered the employ of Messrs. Templeton & Co., General Agents, of St. Helens, E.C. I broke off my connection with the firm under circumstances fraught with such menace to myself, such peril to the man I loved, that the recollection sends a chill to my heart, a shudder through my blood, recalls a vivid sense of danger.

The firm had advertised for an expert typine and shorthand writer at a good salary. I answered the advertisement, interviewed the senior partner, and secured the appointment. I had reason, I thought, to congratulate myself on my success. The hours were easy, the work light, and the salary £2 a week—larger than I had expected. I was earning very little at the time and caught eagerly at the chance of making more money. I had no one but myself to consult; my people were dead, my sweetheart, Noel Masterman, abroad. I had but my own judgment to rely on. That the judgment of nineteen is not infallible I discovered to my cost.

The office was a large and handsomely appointed one, with good, solid-looking furniture, the regulation Turkey carpet, massive desks, and a brand-new typewriter.

The firm, it appeared, were agents for all kinds of things, and all sorts of people, and their clients were to be found in every part of the world! Their correspondence was necessarily a heavy one, and the number of letters I had to type increased daily.

Mr. Templeton, the senior partner, before mentioned, instructed me in my duties. He was a middle-aged man with a fresh colour, a bald head, and neat-looking grey whiskers. He showed an unusually large expanse of shirt-front, which, with his carefully knotted tie, and handsome diamond pin, gave him an appearance of benevolent opulence that was most impressive.

He struck me as a very kind old gentleman indeed, the first day I saw him. I had reason later to alter my opinion.

I did not see much of the other members of the firm, Mr. Harrington Shackell and Rigby Starr respectively. As a rule they didn't turn up at the office until late in the afternoon, when the work was finished and it was time for me to go. Mr. Shackell was a broad-shouldered giant, square-jawed, steel-eyed, with a taciturn, at times morose, manner. He was a great contrast to the junior partner in more ways than one. Slight and fair, with a pink-and-white skin, blue eyes and curling lashes, Rigby Starr was invariably cheerful, and on the best of terms with himself and all the world.

Mr. Templeton, unlike the others, was very regular in his attendance. Punctually at half-past ten, with immaculate shirt-front and neatly brushed whiskers, he seated himself at his desk and proceeded to dictate the answers to his correspondence. The letters I had to type were not very interesting, they mostly consisted of price lists and quotations from the share market. We never seemed to get orders from our clients, their requirements seemed limited by the lists before mentioned.

Mr. Templeton appeared to take a kindly interest in me, and between whiles encouraged me to talk freely of my affairs. He was very sympathetic about Noel, and patted my shoulder in a fatherly sort of fashion when I told him my sweetheart was abroad. One afternoon he got quite confidential.

"He is a doctor, you say, Miss Gillespie? It ought not to be difficult for a promising young fellow like that to get an opening in England."

"He has no capital," I answered, sighing. "It's worse than useless for a doctor to start a practice without some hundreds to fall back upon."

"I don't think he should have left England all the same; it's not fair to you. Yes, I mean it, Miss Gillespie; he should have had more consideration."

"You mustn't blame him, Mr. Templeton," I said eagerly. "Noel couldn't help himself. He was brought up by his uncle, Sir Francis Masterman, who was awfully good to him. All his expenses at hospital were paid, and it was arranged that a practice should be purchased. When—when——" I paused, flushing under my employer's scrutiny—"Noel met me——" I said in a low voice.

"And fell desperately in love, eh? Quite understandable, Miss Gillespie. If I were twenty years younger I should do the same thing myself."

"But Sir Francis had other views for his nephew," I

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continued. "He opposed the idea of our marriage bitterly, and at last gave Noel to understand that if he persisted in the engagement he must expect no further assistance."

"Whereon Noel promptly left his uncle's house, eh?" Mr. Templeton smiled, benevolently.

"Yes. Do you think it was wrong of him?"

"I think, my dear young lady," the senior partner spoke emphatically, "it was the wisest and the bravest thing he could have done."

"Thank you," I said, touched by his sympathy.

"And what is Mr. Noel doing now, if I may ask the question?"

"He's travelling with an old school friend who is in bad health."

"Medical companion, eh? Dear, dear, what a pity I didn't know of this before. I had a letter only the other day from a physician practising in the Midlands, who asked me to look out for an assistant. I should think Dr. Masterman would suit him exactly. You must bring him back to England, Miss Gillespie, and we'll find him something to do."

"It's most kind of you," I murmured; "thank you very much indeed."

"Not at all, not at all. I assure you it's a positive pleasure to me to help young people." He beamed refulgently, the very incarnation of middle-aged benevolence.

"It's an unfortunate thing for a young fellow to be obliged to quarrel with his family," he went on after a pause. "Does Dr. Masterman correspond with his cousins at all?"

"Sir Francis has only one son," I replied. "His name is Herbert; he and Noel are great friends; they still write to each other."

"Most comforting to you, my dear young lady, that it should be so. Sir Francis is a very wealthy man, I believe; failing his son, your sweetheart would, I suppose, inherit the property?"

"I suppose so," I returned surprised. "I never thought of that."

"Dear me, I daresay not. And now"—he turned suddenly to his desk—"we must get to work. There are some letters here which it is important should catch the country post. Please type them at once. You copy all your letters?" He glanced at me sharply, and, a little disconcerted at his change of manner, I murmured that I made a point of doing so.

I remembered the question later, and realised how completely I had been befooled. There was nothing in the routine of the office faintly suggestive of any but ordinary business proceedings; a steady-going, old-fashioned concern, I thought it, and regarded Mr. Templeton as a model of industry and perseverance.

That afternoon Rigby Starr and Mr. Shackell arrived about four o'clock. By this time I was aware of the reason for their absence from the office. The two partners, it appeared, were canvassing for orders during the morning, and called in to report progress of an afternoon!

I encountered the pair in the corridor. I was going out to post the letters, one of which I noted was addressed to the physician whom Mr. Templeton had mentioned. Doubtless the letter contained a reference to Noel; I felt very grateful to the firm of Templeton & Co., and returned Rigby's greeting with a pleasant smile.

It was a fine afternoon, and I felt tempted to prolong my absence from the office. I felt light-hearted and happy beyond expression at the thought that Noel and I might soon be re-united. What a fortunate thing it was that I had seen the firm's advertisement in the paper! What a lucky thing that Mr. Templeton had engaged me. Who would have thought that so ordinary an occurrence would have brought about such wonderful results? I was so busy planning out the future that I forgot to notice how the time was slipping by, and it gave me quite a shock when a neighbouring clock struck five.

For a moment I hesitated as to whether I should return to the office at all that afternoon. My work was practically over, and no one was likely to reproach me for my absence. I remembered, however, that I had left my coat behind, and that Noel's last letter was in the pocket. I hastened back at once eager to regain its possession. I opened the office door softly and stood somewhat timidly upon the threshold; for a moment I thought the room was empty. The sound of voices convinced me of my mistake. Behind the screen that stood between Mr. Templeton's desk and the door, the three partners were engaged in conversation. The screen was large and so arranged that the desk was hidden from view on that side of the room.

I did not wish to disturb their talk, so stepped quietly towards the cupboard where my coat was hanging and slipped it over my arm. I had regained the door and was about to close it behind me, when Shackell's voice, raised above its usual tone, arrested my attention.

"It will be the biggest thing on record if we pull it off," he said exultantly.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't," said the senior partner softly. "The scheme is beautifully simple. The old man can't last very long. Once he's dead the young one will return to England. As the nephew of the deceased gentleman he will inherit the property—failing the son. There will be, in effect, but one life between him and the money."

"And that," said Rigby slowly, "won't be a long life!" He laughed as he spoke, a curious sort of laugh that gave me an odd feeling of repulsion. I closed the door and hurried from the building vaguely disquieted. I pondered long as to what Rigby could have meant by that strange speech, but could arrive at no solution. My thoughts indeed were distracted from the problem by the discovery that Noel's letter was no longer in my pocket. I was absolutely certain that I had left it in my coat, and felt greatly concerned at its loss.

Next morning I found Mr. Templeton at the office when I arrived. He greeted me with a kindly smile, and asked if I had lost anything of value.

"There, there," I won't tease you," he said, "here's your letter, Miss Gillespie. I found it on the table by the typewriter. It's very pleasant to have such letters, I know, but you shouldn't read them in the office hours, it interferes with work."

I was much too abashed by the reproof to protest against the accusation. I never read Noel's letters in the office, they were much too precious. Neither, and of this I was sure, had I taken the epistle from my pocket. It must, I supposed, have dropped from my coat.

Later, I arrived at a different conclusion.

"So your sweetheart's at Nice," said Mr. Templeton, after a pause. "I couldn't help seeing the address, you know," he added, with a ponderous attempt at playfulness. "How does he like the place?"

"Very much, thank you," I said stiffly.

The senior partner made no further comment on the matter, but late that afternoon I noticed on his desk a letter addressed to a man of the name of Martin at the Poste Restante, Nice. It struck me at the time as peculiar he should have written that day to the very place where Noel was staying, but I look on it as a strange coincidence no more.

For the next week things went on as usual at St. Helens. Mr. Templeton did not again allude to an appointment for Noel, and the hope his hint had roused in me gradually died away. One afternoon I felt especially miserable. I sat at the table staring blankly at the typewriter. My heart was aching for my boy; it seemed as though we should be separated for ever. Even if he did return he might no longer care for me.

I remembered that one of the clerks at my last situation had summed me up as "a red-haired girl with a large mouth and green eyes." I had not minded the description at the time, now it appeared horribly truthful. I decided that I was too ugly for Noel to admire, and was tempted to shed a few tears for my lack of beauty, when the door opened and, yes, Noel himself appeared.

Somehow or other I avoided the typewriter and the tables that stood between us, and rushed, I confess it, rushed to

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his side. I forgot the office, the senior partner, my work, forgot everything but that my boy was with me, his arms about me, his dear face close to mine.

When I had regained possession of my faculties, I became conscious of Mr. Templeton's amused regard. He rose nobly to the occasion, however, and insisted I should take leave of absence for the remainder of the day. Noel took a fancy to him at once, and seemed very glad that I was working with such kindly people.

After we'd left the building he told me what had brought him so suddenly to England.

"I had a wire from my cousin Herbert," he explained. "Sir Francis has had a paralytic stroke and is not expected to live. I went straight to the house in Eaton Square, hoping he would see and recognise me, but I fear there is no chance of his regaining consciousness."

"You must not stay away from him for my sake, Noel. You ought to return to the house at once. Let us take a cab and drive there quickly."

"But when we reached the square we found it was too late. The Baronet was dead! And Herbert, his son, reigned in his place.

As I learnt the news, the words that I had overheard in the office came back to me.

"The old man can't last very long. When he's dead the young one will return to England. Between him and the property there's but one life. And that won't be a long one."

"Noel," I said impulsively, "Noel, is your cousin Eric delicate at all?"

"Very far from it," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

I murmured some excuse, and dropped the matter. It was absurd to suppose there could be any connection between Herbert and the man whom Rigby said *would not live long.*

After Sir Francis' death events came very quickly.

Mr. Templeton, in the course of business, had a doctor's practice offered him for sale. He spoke to Noel about it, and suggested he should try to make some arrangements for the purchase. A thousand pounds was the sum required. A large price, but my lover said none too much to pay as the doctor's connection was a large one. Close on the suggestion came the reading of the late Baronet's will, and, to our delight, we found that the old gentleman had relented at the last moment and left Noel a thousand pounds!

"I'm glad he thought kindly of me," said my lover. "I owe him very much."

"You'll be able to buy the practice, Noel?" I said excitedly. "It seems too good to come true."

That evening Noel took me round to Eaton Square to see Sir Herbert. I liked the latter immensely. He was a tall, fair man, with a very charming manner, and a great friendship for his cousin.

"I suppose you two will set up housekeeping directly," he said, laughing. "Are you going to start a practice, Noel?"

"I'm in treaty for one already," he answered. "Messrs. Templeton and Co., the firm where Sara is engaged as typine, have a splendid thing in view."

"You couldn't do better than follow their advice. If they recommend it, you may be sure it's a good thing. I've had some dealings with the firm myself. I found them very decent people. As a matter of fact, I was hard up about a year ago. I'd over-run the constable a bit, and I didn't care to ask my father for assistance. Templeton and Co. let me have an advance of five thousand, and only charged 3 per cent. for the transaction."

"Didn't they want any security?" asked Noel, surprised.

"A merely nominal one. I had to insure my life in their favour. I forget how much the policy was made out for, fifteen thousand, I think."

Impulsively I started to my feet

Sara jumped to her feet. "That valet is Harrington Shackell, my employer," she cried.

"Do you mean, Sir Herbert, that if you died Mr. Templeton would have fifteen thousand pounds?"

"Something like that," he answered, smiling. "You don't credit the firm with bloodthirsty designs, do you, Miss Gillespie?"

"N—no, of course not," I answered, ashamed of my interference. "It seemed a strange sort of transaction, that's why I asked."

"It's not unusual," he replied. "However, I'll call up to-morrow, redeem the debt, and consign my life policy to the flames. Does that reassure you?"

"I'm not really alarmed," I answered, laughing. All the same I felt a vague uneasiness; I was half-inclined to repeat that conversation I had overheard. And yet how foolish such conduct would appear! I really had no cause to distrust Templeton and Co.

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We stayed quite late at Eaton Square. Herbert was delighted to have his cousin back again, and seemed as if he could not bear to part with him. Just as we were going, he remembered a certain pearl necklace belonging to his mother, which he said would just suit me.

"I'll ring for my valet, he knows where it is. I won't keep you waiting long, Miss Gillespie."

The valet at this juncture appeared, and was dispatched for the trinket. Some few minutes later he returned, a small casket in his hand.

He was a tall, square-shouldered man, with a grim, clean-shaven face. As he stood under the electric light his face seemed curiously familiar.

With a cry I started to my feet, and, pointing to him I cried:

"That man is Harrington Shackell, one of my employers!"

"My dear Sara, what are you thinking of?" said Noel. "Mr. Shackell has a moustache. It's merely a chance resemblance"—and he motioned to the valet's face, innocent of beard or moustache.

"How silly of me," I said, with a gasp. I looked the apology I was too nervous to make.

"Now you come to mention it, Watkins is rather like Shackell," said Herbert. "Capital man, Watkins," he added, "been with me over a year."

The valet signified his appreciation of the compliment with a profound bow, deposited the casket in my hands, and left the room.

The necklace was very exquisite, and in my enthusiasm for my pretty present, all thought of Watkins and his strange likeness to Mr. Templeton's partner left my mind.

Next morning I was at the office early. The arrangements for the purchase of the practice were to be concluded, and I was all excitement till the thing was settled.

Noel arrived looking very handsome, in his light-tweed travelling suit.

"I've had bad news, my dear," he said. Then glancing round the office—Templeton had gone out—he slipped his arm about my waist.

"I'm obliged to leave England, dearest, now at once. I've had a wire from the hotel at Nice to say that my patient is dangerously ill. I can't leave him to the mercy of strangers; he's been a very good pal to me."

"But, Noel, what about the practice? To-day is the last moment. You must decide to-day. It would be a dreadful thing if it should slip through your fingers." I paused, a mist in my eyes. If the practise were secured it would mean that Noel and I could get married almost immediately. If not, there would be months, perhaps years of weary waiting, years in which he might get tired of a girl with red hair and green eyes.

"It's a most unfortunate thing that you should have to leave to-day, Mr. Masterman," said Templeton, when the case was explained. "Of course you're bound to go; still, it's unfortunate."

"Can't you conclude the purchase in my absence?" said Noel. "I can sign any papers that are necessary, giving you authority to act on my behalf. As for the money, I've arranged for that already. My cousin has given me a cheque for a thousand pounds pending the settlement of my uncle's property."

"It's hardly according to form," said Mr. Templeton, "I'd rather you signed the agreement yourself. Still, as the matter's urgent I'd better do as you request. The money is to be paid to-morrow morning, Mr. Masterman. You enter into possession of the house and practice any time within the next three months."

"Quite so, quite so," said Noel. "I'm quite satisfied that it's worth the money, and I shall be glad if you'll see the business through for me. Here is the cheque," he pushed the paper towards the senior partner. "If you'll give me a receipt for the amount and draw up the document that empowers you to act for me, I shall be obliged."

Slowly and carefully Mr. Templeton wrote out the receipt and handed it to Noel.

"There's a lawyer a few doors down the passage," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll engage him to draw up the paper. It's as well to do things according to rule and regulation."

The senior partner disappeared, returning with his friend the solicitor.

"If you'll put your name, Mr. Masterman, at the foot of this paper, I shall be able to act on your behalf."

Noel took the paper and carelessly scrawled his signature.

"Have you read it, sir?" asked Templeton.

My lover nodded.

"It's precious full of legal terms," he said, laughing, "any one would think I was a landed proprietor by the fashion in which you allude to my 'estate'."

"Mere phraseology," said Templeton, "a thousand pounds is not to be despised."

The solicitor, having witnessed the signing of the all-important document withdrew. Mr. Templeton considerately followed his example.

"Good-bye, sweetheart," said my dear one. "I shall be back again soon, and then we shall be together always."

A last kiss, a last pressure of the hand, and he was gone!

Before we met again many things, dark, strange and terrible had come to pass.

Shortly after Noel's departure, Mr. Templeton went out and I was left alone in the office.

"I may not be back till late in the afternoon, Miss Gillespie," he said. "Don't trouble to wait for me. You can leave as soon as you're through with those letters."

I thanked him and set to work with a will. My correspondence took longer than I had anticipated, however, and it was just on five before I had finished.

With a sigh of relief I covered up the typewriter and put on my hat and coat. At the last moment I remembered that I had left a book of Noel's in a small room opening out of the office. I call it a room, but in reality it was little more than a large cupboard. One could hardly turn round without knocking the walls, and it was impossible to move unless the door was closed. I had some trouble in finding the book; it had got stowed away on the top shelf. Just as I came across it, somebody entered the outer office. I glanced round the crack of the door and saw Mr. Templeton, followed by Rigby Starr.

"Well," said the latter in a quick, impatient voice, "how have things gone?"

"Up to the present perfectly. Look!" As he spoke the senior partner laid a packet on the table.

"Bank notes, eh?" said Rigby, seizing on the crisp bits of paper. "Two, four, six—why, you have got the whole thousand, Templeton?"

The other nodded.

"A thousand, aye, and twenty times that sum to come. The scheme has gone without a hitch. Noel Masterman called here this morning on his way to Nice. He was wired for by his friend."

"What a lucky thing the telegram arrived. Came in the nick of time."

The other nodded.

"Yes, it has saved us some trouble; as it is he'll be there safely out of the way for some weeks. He left me his cheque for the purchase of the practice, and what practically amounts to a power of attorney, authorising me to deal with his estate. Just imagine, Rigby—his estate!"

There was a triumph in his voice, a suggestion of evil in his laugh that alarmed me. My heart beat heavily, my breath came hard and short. I strained my ears to catch what followed.

"It's a great coup," said Rigby. "I suppose," he glanced half fearfully at Templeton. "I suppose matters will go smoothly to the finish?"

"That's all right, we can trust Shackell to finish the job." He laughed as he spoke, and for the first time I realised that his mouth was cruel. The thin lips curved away from the pointed yellow teeth, the eyes glistened. I crouched close to the door and listened ever with apprehension.

"At the moment, then," said Rigby, "we are waiting——"

Templeton raised his hand.

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"Listen!" he said.

Down the long corridor there sounded footsteps, hurried, eager. Nearer and nearer came the tread, and as the feet approached, the fear that clutched my heart grew keener, stronger. All the vague dread, the apprehension of the last few weeks were centred in that instant, on the man that even now stood at the door—a messenger of evil tidings.

"Shackell!" cried Rigby with a start. The boyish face seemed suddenly grown old, the pink and white complexion changed to the leaden hue of fear. "What news?" he stammered.

"Sit down." The senior partner thrust his back into his chair. "Well, what has happened?" and he faced the tall, square-shouldered giant with resolution.

"I've done the job," said Shackell slowly.

"He's dead?" Rigby's eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"As a door nail."

"You're quite sure?"

With an oath he turned upon the boy.

"Confound you, leave me alone," he snarled. "I tell you that Herbert Masterman is dead."

Herbert Masterman! For a moment my brain refused to grasp the news. Only last night I had seen him, spoken to him. I recalled his voice, his laugh, the words that he had said. It was not true, it could not be true. A darkness came before my eyes, a horrible tightness clutched my throat. If I could scream! Dear Heaven, if only I could scream!

"How did you do it?" Rigby's voice trembled, he was not such a hardened criminal as the other.

Shackell leant back and stretched his arms with a sigh of satisfaction.

"As we arranged," he answered. "Templeton and I discussed the thing last week. There's a well staircase at Eaton Square built of stone. The flight of stairs that leads to Sir Herbert's suite of rooms is a long one, some twenty stairs from top to bottom. It happened that the carpets were taken up to-day for cleaning purposes, so that the stone was left exposed. As usual I left the house at four o'clock this afternoon, returning by the back entrance some ten minutes later. Sir Herbert was still in his room. I fastened a wire across the stairs, slender and strong, and quite invisible to the baronet, who suffers from short sight. Then I retired into my bedroom, next to Sir Herbert's. I heard him cross the landing, run down the stairs, and then"—Harrington Shackell paused—"Sir Herbert caught his foot, stumbled and fell with a crash, the whole length of the stairs, striking his head against the stones. When they picked him up he was—done for."

"The wire?" said Rigby, moistening his dry lips, "did you remove the wire?"

"I'm not a fool," was the reply. "I'm not likely to risk my neck. I whipped the wire out of sight, slipped upstairs and out through the attic window on to the leads. From there I climbed into the next house, an empty one. I left there an hour ago, and came here by a devious route."

"I suppose there's no chance of your being recognised as Sir Herbert's valet?"

"Not the ghost of one. The only person who ever noticed the likeness was that red-haired fool of Templeton's. She'll have to be got out of the way very shortly," he added grimly.

"I'll look after that," said the senior partner. "She's been very useful up to the present."

"By Jove," cried Shackell suddenly, "the papers have got hold of it already. They're crying the news!"

Hastening across the room he flung the window open wide.

"Terrible death of a Baronet! Sir Herbert Masterman killed!" The harsh voice of the newsboy echoed through the place.

Terrible death of a Baronet—the words beat upon my brain. The horror that had filled me gave place to a sudden sense of personal danger. At any moment those men might discover my whereabouts. They might hear me, see me, and then—— I closed my eyes and tried vainly to regain my self-control. If they knew I was there—within a few feet of them, my fate was sealed.

I must have lost consciousness for a while for the next thing I remember hearing was my lover's name.

"From what you say then, Templeton, Noel Masterman—or to give him his right title, Sir Noel, is disposed of for some time?"

"Yes. His friend is seriously ill, too ill to be left. I shall wire him the news of his cousin's death to-night and offer to act in his absence. If he accepts my offer, well and good. If not——" The senior partner smiled. "Martin will see to him," he said softly.

The remembrance of the letter I had seen weeks back addressed to that same Martin flashed across my mind. There had been a plot—a vile plot against Noel from the first. And I—I had aided and abetted it!

"Meanwhile I shall commence operations at once. This document"—he touched the paper Noel had signed—"empowers me to deal with the estate. It is drawn up by a solicitor, who witnessed the signature, and will hold good in any court of law. The position, therefore, is this. Either by fair means or otherwise Masterman will be kept out of England for some time to come. When he returns"—his thin lips curved in a hideous smile—"he will find his fortune vanished and the firm of Templeton & Co. dissolved."

The words roused me from the apathy of terror, benumbing my faculties, deadening my brain. In a flash I realised the danger that threatened Noel. Templeton & Co. were scoundrels, criminals, who would stop at nothing to achieve their ends. They had used me as a tool, a cat's paw, taking advantage of my ignorance and inexperience, they had employed me to cloak their infamy. For a moment I thought I would rush out and raise an alarm, but reflection warned me of the uselessness of such a course. Who would believe my statement? To all appearance Messrs. Templeton & Co. were respectable traders. The charge of murder would be laughed at, the suggestion of conspiracy waived aside.

And yet something must be done at once with the paper, the fatal paper Noel had signed, for my lover's future was practically at their disposal. True, I might warn him, but, and there lay the difficulty, I must first leave the office. Even supposing I got away, they would still retain possession of the document and the bank notes. I might remain hidden safely until they left the office. Then I could ring the bell, the caretaker of the premises would release me, and I could take steps to protect my lover. But if I failed to prove the trio guilty Noel's fortune might disappear; Noel himself be murdered.

It came home to me that the one chance of defeating the gang lay in my *taking the paper with me!*

The very thought sent me sick and dizzy. It was useless and worse than useless to pit my puny strength against these three determined men. Suppose I made good my escape with the paper and the notes; by a wide stretch of fancy I fancied myself safely outside the door. Even then I should be hunted down and killed without mercy—like a rat. I could not appeal to the police—I should have to explain how the notes came into my possession. I could not hope to match Templeton & Co. in cunning.

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And yet slowly but surely the conviction was borne in upon me that I must seize the paper from the table and make a sudden dash for the door. Once outside in the corridor I could make plans. Meantime I dare not let the opportunity escape.

I fought against the voice that told me that I must do the thing. I looked shudderingly through the crack towards the partners and read merciless brutality on the faces of all three.

Templeton, cunning and cold, had brains that would outmatch the cleverest. Shackell—I could not look at him. I saw in fancy the fair head, the kindly face of the man whom he had murdered.

Rigby, though the youngest of the band, I feared and loathed more than all. Under that soft smile, that winning face, there lay a desire for torture. The others swindled, murdered for gain. Rigby took pleasure in the pain that he inflicted—the pleasure of a coward.

For a while they chatted over the events of the day, apportioned the money the insurance company would have to pay as a result of Herbert's murder, discussed the arrangements for the future, divided beforehand Noel's fortune and estate. And I had to listen to them, had to quiet myself, keep back the scream of terror that choked me, the impulse to flee that beat against my resolution and my will.

At last Templeton rose, and lighting a cigar suggested they should adjourn. Now, if ever, was my chance to seize the papers, now if ever was the opportunity to thwart their cruel design. Shackell and Starr seated at the table, had their backs towards me. Templeton on the other side, leaning over to them, did not observe the gradual opening of the door—the door that was between them and the "red-haired fool!" The papers—the bank notes for a thousand pounds and the document that gave the senior partner power over Noel's estate—lay at the corner of the table, at Templeton's right. If I could creep across the room and reach the table unobserved I might——

Shackell broke into a laugh at some murmured joke of Rigby's. I crouched back shivering behind the door. I could not do it, I could not run the risk!

And yet with Noel's fortune, perhaps his life at stake, I dared not hesitate. With the desperation of despair I crept out of my hiding-place and made my way across the room. Nearer and nearer to the table, so close that I hear Shackell's heavy breath, feel the vibration of his laugh!

If he should turn round, if Templeton should look up—I felt in fancy cruel fingers at my throat, strangling my breath, choking my very life.

Closer, by slow degrees, past Shackell; by the back of Rigby's chair, until the papers, the precious papers, came within touch of my hands, within reach of my fingers.

I dare not consider, I dare not hesitate. Blindly I put out my hand, snatched the notes, clutched the document.

An oath from Templeton, a shriek from me, and then, throwing over chairs and table in my mad flight, I rushed across the room, the panting breath of my pursuers close behind.

A stick deftly thrown struck my head and blinded my eyes with pain. Another second and they would be upon me. Would the door never open, the handle never turn? A last convulsive effort and I had opened the door, banged it in the enemy's face, locked it on the other side.

And then, clasping the papers to my heart, down the long corridor I rushed, and out into the street—a fugitive!

(Next week tells of how Sara leaves London to avoid her pursuers, and hides in Bedford, see "Your Editor Chats," on page 495.)

"The Gamble of Life,"
Arthur Applin's Powerful
New Serial Story, starts in
FRIDAY'S "PEARSON'S WEEKLY."
ONE PENNY. EVERYWHERE.

THE POWER OF HEREDITY.

Showing What Can be Done by Love.

Archie was a clerk on £100 a year. He was a good sort, but weak, and his major weakness was a habit of putting money on the wrong horse, a dangerous amusement on £100 a year.

Archie was an orphan. He had been brought up by a maiden aunt, who, on Sundays, with a Bible in her lap, would frequently relate to him the story of his father's ruin, terminating her lecture with a homily on the evils of gambling, and a quotation on the power of heredity. These sermons were both bitter and narrow-minded.

When Archie earned sufficient to exist, he rebelled, and, flying from his aunt and her lectures, sought refuge at lodgings of his own, in a back alley, where Sunday papers were in order, and there he spent his day of rest in gleaning sporting tips.

Now Archie, like the majority of his confrères, got a yearly holiday, when he went to the seaside, but the wrong horse ran away with the money, until a year came when the holiday was perforce curtailed to a week-end. An eventful week-end, however, which ruled the fate of Archie.

It was a glorious, windy day, typical of the watering-place. The beach buzzed with excited trippers, great waves pounded and crunched the shingle, niggers howled coon songs and tummed on their banjos, children with spades and buckets chirped and chattered, the silly nursemaid giggled at the donkey boy, modest spinsters wrestled with their skirts, the ice-cream man shouted down the Punch-and-Judy show, and dogs and gulls joined in the general hubbub, to the droning accompaniment of "Nice day for a sail, sir; Nice boat, good lady." Archie was bored, he flopped on a seat by the sands.

The noise jarred on his nerves. The wind whirled dirty papers past. They reminded him of bills. He threw a pebble at a stout and well-fed dog, which rushed vaguely into a stouter and better fed woman, and upset her.

Archie smiled, then he moralised: "A fellow can't help his weakness, any more than that dog could help charging that woman. It sounds very grand to say 'Fight 'em,' a fellow simply can't, especially when that weakness is his dad's only legacy. I agree with this philosophy 'Heredity is stronger than any influence.' Yes, that sounds like a copy-book; in fact, it's good enough for Huxley or Darwin, or that sort of clever Johnny. The world at large ought to hear it. By Jove! I'll write it in the sand with my stick."

He did so, then went back to the boarding house for tea.

On the way to the house, where the by-street joins the High Street, he saw a crowd collecting, and that vice which bubbles in all women and most men bubbled in Archie, so he became inquisitive.

An old man had swooned, a dirty, unkempt old creature, with a beer-flushed visage. The kind crowd had taken it for a fit, and with typical forethought formed a ring round him to exclude the air. Archie always prided himself on his power of resource, he loved emergencies, and at once became the man of the moment. He elbowed his way through the onlookers, and called loudly for breathing space and brandy. A flask was forthcoming and the effect was electrical. The old man opened his eyes, and seeing the flask, grabbed it. He readily drank the contents; then was assisted to his feet. Archie lingered when the others had dispersed. He gave the old man twopence, which he pocketed with thanks and a hiccough.

After tea, Archie was still bored, but returned to the seat by the sands. There was someone else sitting there, so he took the other end.

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The tide had risen; the trippers seemed less noisy, their mouths, no doubt, too full of shrimps to admit of loud conversation.

Archie looked seawards, successive hoots from an excursion steamer attracted him, the steamer looked so angry, and the little fishing boats ahead, so unconcerned.

He watched the steamer manœuvre between them, then looked down at his epigram in the sand, "Heredity is stronger than any influence save"—he never wrote "save"—"save love." He repeated it aloud. "How on earth—" but a rippling laugh interrupted him from the end of the seat, and he turned to see a dainty little girl in a white muslin dress, hat in lap, and fair hair waving in the wind.

"Bless my soul," ejaculated Archie, then they both blushed and turned away.

The moment was awkward. A stronger and bolder man would have seized the opportunity, but Archie made full-stops with his stick in the sand. He had made an oblate spheroid of full stops round his boot, before Providence came to his rescue. A puff of wind, decreed by the Fates, gently lifted the hat from the girl's lap, and away it went, whisked and trundled, over and over the sands, with dogs, children, and Archie in hot pursuit. The girl smiled—knowingly, perhaps.

Archie raced the black retriever, and beat him on the post, but the black retriever had slobbered on the bow, so Archie returned, a hero, indeed, wiping it with his handkerchief.

It was only a cheap hat, 1s. 11¾d. at a recent sale, a hat of the shape that contorts to suit the fashion and a woman's will, but Archie returned with it in safety, carrying it with a care that did credit to a Bond Street milliner, or a mother with her darling mite.

"Thanks," said the girl, as she pushed the pins in, "it nearly went into the sea."

Archie felt more comfortable. He almost wished it in the sea, for he was a good swimmer. Then he sat down, closer than before, and they discussed the place, the weather, and many mundane things, and finally they laughed at the epigram in the sand.

It was dusk when Archie said "Good-night," and by then he had told the whole story of heredity, and she had listened without laughter. They left the epigram in the sand, but neither forgot it.

Next morning he returned to the same seat, a happy, eager, Archie. It was very early, and the gulls and the sun welcomed him, possibly they took his presence for granted. There was the epigram untouched, so Archie sat down, and re-read it twenty times, dwelling more and more on the last two words.

But what was that! A piece of crumpled paper stuck in the letter "e"—a bill, ugh! He had forgotten bills, how dare paper trespass on his holy ground. He picked it up, it was crisp, with a familiar, and yet unfamiliar crispness. Ye gods and little fishes! It was a five pound note.

Archie felt like a thief in the night, nevertheless thrust it into his pocket. Someone was hailing, so with a shamefaced look he turned to find the old man who had had a fit the day before.

"Hullo, joker! Looking for diamonds; found any?"

"Ha! no—er, not exactly. How are you?"

"Tidy enough, thankee, tidy enough for Ascot and the Gold Cup."

"You are a sporting man—a bookie, perhaps," said Archie.

"Aye, I was once, and as 'cute and as straight as the Turf breeds, but I'm poor now, with a big drag on my purse-strings."

"Big family; eh?"

"Bless you, sonnie, no; nothing so troublesome."

"What then?"

"A thirst; a very expensive thirst."

Archie smiled. The old man was proud of his thirst.

"Well, lad, I like you," he continued, "you gave me tuppence yestereen, give me another and I'll return you a billionfold."

Archie smiled again, and gave it to him. The old man's voice came low but more raspy, he moved close to Archie and bent over his ear.

"Got any money?"

"Er—a very little."

"Then pawn your clothes, your life, your soul, my son, and put it all on Rosemary for the Gold Cup. It's a straight 'un!" cried the old man, and with a slow emphasis he added, as he tapped Archie's shoulder and hobbled off, "from a straight chap."

Archie stood in a dream. The old man moved slowly on, jingling his coppers. Then Archie shook himself, and called:

"Can't stop," came the reply, "must get to Ascot."

Archie stared at the sand, the letters there were rising and hitting him. "Go to Ascot," he cried, sinking back on the seat, "Rosemary or the other; I suppose I must choose now and for ever."

An hour later he was walking on the esplanade, the five-pound note felt less crisp, the battle had waned, only muffled and irregular firing drummed in his ear. A white muslin dress turned the corner.

Ah, what would that money buy, a Bond Street hat, a necklace, brooch, or any other glittering gem dear to woman's eyes. "Let Rosemary go hang!" said Archie, as he strode boldly forth to meet the dress.

He returned to hard work on the Monday, leaving a glad heart and a promise behind him. He had told the girl of his lucky find, had sworn that it was hers to spend, but she was immovable. "No," she had said, "you are to keep it, and not until I tell you, are you to spend it. One year from to-day we will meet at this very seat, and until then, Archie, you will not hear from me."

* * *

The year had passed, Archie was returning to the seaside. How sweet the world looked, the birds so happy, the trees so green, even the train drummed contentedly as it bore him nearer, nearer. How hard it had been, and yet in the end, how easy. No bills, no worries, and the same crisp five-pound note.

He turned to the esplanade, his lips were dry and refused to whistle, his heart throbbed like a dynamo.

"I wonder if she really meant it," how many thousand times had he said that in the last year. The answer came back "yes." A white muslin dress by the old seat, and laughing eyes, dimmed, perhaps, with tears. *It was she!*

"So you have really come," she said softly. He was no longer bashful, he took her up in his arms with an honest hug. The niggers' lullaby died with a gasp, the five-pound note got terribly crushed, but Archie did not heed.

"God bless you, little woman," he said huskily, "I have kept my promise."

They sat on the old seat and gazed at the sea.

"Archie," she whispered, "I have other five-pound notes, but they are yours now, dear, ours, Archie. God grant, like this one, they may bring blessings."

And only then did he understand.

"But how on earth," he exclaimed a little later, "did you think that I should find it in the sand?"

She laughed merrily. "Ah, Mr. Philosopher, that needs no telling, when a woman's instinct *knows* that heredity is weaker than love."

Lucy Phair.

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'Twixt the Cup and the Lip.

The Romance of a Fisherman's Bride.

"One more day, darling, and then the union I have so long desired will be effected, and you will be my wife."

The speaker was a tall, bronzed, brown-bearded fisherman, with clear, frank, blue eyes, and a brow that bore evidence of greater intellectuality than the majority of his class. Yet he was but a fisherman, for, though his capabilities were above his station, he loved the sea and the simple life of the fisher-folk, and was contented. The girl whom he addressed was as sweet a type of innocent maidenhood as could be seen on all the broad coast of Sussex—with sunny curls that seemed to court disorder and broke away from the fetters which bound them, with deep, dark violet eyes, that looked into one's own with all the shy fearlessness of innocence, and ripe red lips, to whose sweetness the man at her side could have testified. For he had won her, and, when the golden sun had risen and set and risen again, she was to be his wife. It was dark now, and they sat together on the green slope of a great cliff that overlooked the dark-blue sea.

"The night seems born for happiness," he said, taking the girl's hand in his. "But the weather may change—the waves may rise and the wind roar—but happiness—our happiness—the happiness that comes of perfect love—cannot change."

Muriel Warne looked radiantly up into her lover's face.

"I hope not, dear," she said softly. "But life is not without its cares. Sometimes it seems to me we are in danger of becoming too placid, and need something to wake us up. Trouble is not an unqualified bane. If it teaches us nothing more, the lesson of patience is at least worth learning. And I am not patient. If anything goes wrong, it irritates me, and I generally do something on impulse, which later reason tells me is foolish."

Norman Hurst smiled.

"That is the way we all learn," he said gently. "Experience is the best teacher man ever had, but her lessons are generally the most stern and unrelenting."

"And therefore the longer remembered," replied Muriel.

"Quite so," he said gravely. "But I hope neither you nor I may be judged to be deserving of such lessons."

"I don't know," said Muriel thoughtfully. "I think I am. I am proud and impulsive, and have never known what it is to be thwarted in my life. I could not bear humiliation of any kind—even the humiliation of injury."

"Surely," said the man fondly, "there is none who would injure *you!* Evil is not a stranger to men's hearts, but evil cannot harm you, for innocence is its own safeguard."

"Innocence—yes," replied the girl. "But not when self-will, impatience, and pride of heart distort the judgment, and make one do the things which simple innocence would condemn.

Norman laughed.

"We are becoming quite morbid!" he said. "Let us take a walk along the cliff. The moon is rising and the night is gloriously beautiful."

He leapt to his feet as he spoke and proffered his hand to the girl. Together they went along the margin of the dark cliff, and the darkness soon swallowed them up.

As they disappeared, a man lifted himself from behind a great rock close to where the two had sat. His face was dark, and a scowl made it appear almost malevolent.

"So I am to be the Angel of Destiny, and teach these people patience and fortitude and humility," he said with a sneer. "Quite a new character for me. Not such a bad one either, since the reward will be mine too. So that is how you feel, my lady—'even the humiliation of injury,' eh?—well, so much the better for me! I think I can see my way through this business, and, if the lesson be hard to learn, it will, as you say, be the longer remembered."

He looked once in the direction which the lovers had taken, and then strode rapidly away.

* * * * *

Another night had fallen on the little south-coast fishing village, and the lights twinkled in the many casement windows of the pretty cottages of its inhabitants. But Norman Hurst's assertion that the weather might change had been already verified. The day had been unusually hot, and a storm was even now gathering far out over the sea. Great black clouds were scudding across the murky sky, through which the vivid flash of lightning could be seen by the watchers on the beach. The sea, too, was rising fast, and great, white-crested billows were breaking on the strand. The fishing-boats were hurrying into the bay for shelter from the storm, and the night grew darker and darker.

Within the cottage where she lived, Muriel Warne sat, with her hands folded in her lap, happily thinking of the morrow. She had not seen her lover since the morning, for he had, so he had told her, many things to do in the preparation of their future home. So she would not see him before she met him at the altar.

There was a knock at the door, and she went herself to open it. A tall man stood outside, and he lifted his cap respectfully.

"May I come in?" he said. "There's going to be a storm."

For a moment the girl hesitated. But it would be rude to refuse.

"Yes," she said, as she stepped aside to allow him to enter. "The night looks very threatening, and you will be caught in the rain before you reach home."

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He came in, and Muriel, shutting the door, preceded him into the room, where she had been sitting. A coldly, critical physiognomist would have pronounced Ernest Malcolm a handsome man. Yet, at first sight, few would have shared that opinion. Flawless as were his features, there was an unpleasant shiftiness about the dark eyes and a cruel compressing of the thin lips that repelled one, and stamped the man as untrustworthy. Yet his manner, to Muriel Warne, at any rate, left nothing to be desired. Courteous and polite to a degree, he had so far conquered the instinctive dislike which the girl felt towards him, that she had even come to regard him, in some measure, as her friend. To-night, however, she would have preferred to be alone—alone, to think of the morrow. Once Ernest Malcolm had asked her to be his wife. Her refusal had taken him by surprise, and he had demanded to know its cause. And then she had told him that she loved Norman Hurst and had promised to be his wife, and the man had almost frightened her, so livid and distorted was his face as he heard the news. And then he had turned and gone away without a word.

"How dreadful he looked!" she had said to herself. But the knowledge that she is loved is sweet to a woman, even though she cannot reciprocate it, and Muriel felt sorry for the man and was kinder to him than before.

And now he sat in the little room, with the bright light of the lamp between them, and talked to her with his low, well-modulated voice, until, in spite of her previous preoccupation, she grew interested and talked too. Presently he rose and held out his hand.

"I have come to say good-bye to Miss Warne," he said quietly.

The girl rose also.

"You are not going away?" she asked in surprise.

The man hesitated and gave vent to a little forced laugh.

"I don't know," he said. "I may do, but I am not sure yet. At any rate, it is, I believe, the last time I may address you as Miss Warne."

A deep flush overspread the girl's cheeks as she bowed her head in shy assent. The man's face darkened at the sight, but his voice never changed.

"I trust," he said, with an appearance of deep earnestness, "that the life which is before you may bring you all the happiness you deserve."

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"That is very kind of you," she said, looking up. "And—and generous," she added, with a blush, as she remembered his defeat.

He took her hand in his, and for a moment was silent. Then there came a loud knocking at the outer door, and the girl started back.

"Who can it be?" she said, and went out into the hall.

A boy was standing outside, and the rain was beginning to fall.

"Is Mr. Malcolm here?" he asked. "I've been looking for him everywhere. I'm to give him this letter." And he held it out to Muriel and looked questioningly up into her face. "Aren't you Miss Warne?" he asked, a sudden light coming into his eyes.

Muriel nodded.

"Then there's a letter for you, too. The same gentleman gave me them both." And he handed the girl the second letter. "Good night, miss. It's terrible wet." And he ran off into the darkness and rain.

Muriel went back into the little room and silently handed her visitor the letter addressed to him. It seemed very strange. Both the envelopes bore the handwriting of her lover, Norman Hurst, and some indefinable fear came into the girl's heart. Simultaneously they tore open their envelopes, and, a moment later, an exclamation burst from Ernest Malcolm's lips. Looking across at Muriel, he saw that her face had become deathly white, while her eyes seemed riveted to the letter she held in her hand. For this is what she read:

"DEAR MISS WARNE,—*I know only too well how greatly surprised, and even indignant, you will be when you get this letter. The truth is, I have been living a double life of late—pretending to be what I am not, and never can be, an honest man—for the sake of winning you. But the utter wickedness of the thing has come home to me before it is too late, and I have determined—cost what it will—to relinquish that which is now within my grasp, and go away. For three years I have been an inveterate gambler, and ruin has only been averted by the help of a friend who has many a time stood between me and exposure. Nor is this all, for there are other things which I cannot even mention. Try to forget me. I am not worthy of you, and, did you but know all, you would recoil from me with loathing, and realise, even more than you now do, the degradation to which my kisses—the kisses of a gambler and a libertine—have subjected you. Finally, then, good-bye. You will never see my face again.*—Yours regretfully,

"NORMAN HURST."

She was recalled to herself by the voice of Ernest Malcolm.

"Miss Warne," he said, in a strangely broken voice. "I am afraid my visit to-night has been ill-timed. At least,

"Go through with it," he said. "You never needed a husband more than you do now. Try *me*, Muriel."

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you will do me the justice of believing that this "—he touched the letter he held in his hand—"was not foreseen. May God comfort you in this, your first great trouble." And he held out his hand.

"Oh, I can't believe it," said Muriel, with a little catch in her throat. "There must be some horrible mistake. And yet——"

"I wish I could support you in that belief," said the man. "But——" And he paused and drew a deep breath.

Presently Muriel lifted her eyes. The look in her face was changing from grief to indignation. The humiliation of her position was asserting herself, and anger blazed up in her cheeks.

"It is his own handwriting," she said resentfully. "There's seems no question about it. Oh, how could he so humiliate me!"

There was a long pause. Then the man said:

"What are you going to do—about—to-morrow?"

Muriel started.

"To-morrow?" she said. "Oh, I had forgotten *that!*"

"Your invitations are out and everything is arranged for the wedding," reminded the man in a low, concentrated voice, while he watched the girl's face attentively. "You will have to explain."

"Oh, I can't!" said Muriel vehemently. "Everyone would laugh at me. I can't, and I won't!" And the violet eyes flashed with angry determination.

"Then go through with it," said the man, coolly.

Muriel looked up in amazement.

"Go through with it?" she repeated, in bewilderment.

Ernest Malcolm took a step towards her and caught both her hands in his.

"Yes," he said firmly. "Go through with it. Show the world that, if one man holds your love so lightly—if one man jilts you and casts you off—there is another, who will count himself honoured and ennobled by a union with you. Do not look so frightened, dear. You never needed a husband more than you do at this moment. And I will see to it that no breath of slander is whispered against you. Try me, Muriel!" And he tried to draw her towards him. But she held back.

"Wait," she said. "Let me think."

For fully ten minutes they stood thus, and then the girl lifted her head.

"I will," she said, with sudden resolution. "But you must get a special license, before twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"I will see to that," said the man. "Now I will bid you good-night, for I know you would prefer to be alone. To-morrow then, at twelve. Remember, you have promised!" And he went out of the house and into the darkness.

A little way off he stopped, heedless of the storm that bellowed overhead, and uttered a low, mirthless laugh.

"Beautiful!" he said. "I am qualifying for an actor or—— But we must get the ceremony over first." And he resumed his walk through the driving rain and returned to his home.

* * * * * *

About an hour before the storm broke over the sea, Norman Hurst, who was walking along the beach, was accosted by the self-same boy who, later on, was the bearer of the two letters to Muriel and Ernest Malcolm. Touching his cap, the boy put a letter into his hand and vanished. Norman tore open the envelope, and, by the light of a ship's lantern hanging to one of the luggers on the beach, read the following epistle:

"Dearest Norman,—*A very extraordinary thing has happened to-day, and I must see you at once. There are reasons, however, why you should not come to the house—reasons which I will presently explain. Please meet me under the last eastern groyne. The spot is lonely, and we shall be free from observation. You will find me there already. Will explain all later. Almost—your true wife,* "Muriel."

Norman Hurst turned the letter over. He looked puzzled and bewildered.

"It seems very queer," he muttered to himself. "But it is Muriel's handwriting, safe enough. What can she want?"

The concluding phrase caught his eye, and a smile of wondrous tenderness crept into his handsome face.

"Ah," he said softly—"almost! Yes, it is not far off now. But I must be off, or she will grow tired of waiting." A great gust of wind swept fiercely over the sea, and he looked alarmedly up at the darkening sky. "By Jove," he muttered, "it is going to be a wild sort of night!"

Pulling his hat down over his eyes, he started, and, within a quarter of an hour, was within hail of the last groyne. The spot was very dark and lonely, and he marvelled within himself that Muriel should have chosen such a place. But he plodded on over the rough shingle, and turned down under the lee of the great black groyne. Down he went, almost to the margin of the sea, but he could discern nothing of Muriel. A boat lay beached close to the groyne, but it appeared empty, and he turned away, intending to retrace his way along the sheltered side of the great sea barrier.

But at that instant he felt his arms caught in a powerful grip from behind, and, before he could collect himself, he was thrown violently to the ground and pinioned, hand and foot, with stout, strong cords. Dazed and bewildered without even the chance to fight for his liberty, he was dragged into the boat, and his adversaries, who were two in number dipped their oars in the rising water and pulled vigorously out to sea. Then, for the first time, Norman Hurst saw that he was in a trap, and vaguely realised that the attack upon himself was in some mysterious way connected with Muriel Warne, and he began to struggle with all the strength that was in his muscular frame. He tore at his bonds with the ferocity of a tiger, but not a strand relaxed. His adversaries had done their work well. Then he turned to the men.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded sternly. "And who, and what, are you? Are you so ashamed of your faces that you hide them beneath your mufflers?"

The men laughed.

"You'll know us soon enough," said one. "*The Merry Trawler* lies out in the 'roads' yonder, and you have got to keep us company for a little while—only a matter of four-and-twenty hours though, so there isn't much to grumble about."

"*The Merry Trawler!*" said Norman, sitting upright in the boat in unfeigned astonishment. "Ernest Malcolm's boat! Then you are——"

"We're his crew," replied the man, "We've left the boy aboard, and, by the look of the weather, we shall have to hurry, or he'll go down with the lugger before we can lower the sails."

"But what is the meaning of it all?" persisted Norman, knitting his brows in sheer bewilderment.

"Well," said the man thoughtfully, "Cap'n didn't tell us to keep our mouths shut, and you can't upset his plans now. The fact is, he's got a kind o' hankering arter Miss Warne—Skipper Warne's daughter—and, as he can't get her the straight way, he's trying a roundabout one. He's

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been learnin' your handwritings lately, and he's no fool at it, I can tell ye. So, to-night, he writes you a letter in Miss Warne's handwritin', and Miss Warne another in your'n, and so——"

"Wrote Miss Warne a letter in my handwriting!" said Norman in amazement. "But what purpose would that answer?"

The men laughed and looked at him humorously.

"Well, we don't know exactly what he said in it," resumed the man who had spoken hitherto. "Something about drinkin' and gamblin' and other things that's worse, and tellin' her you was mad with remorse and had run away."

Norman Hurst uttered a cry of rage and tore anew at the cords which bound him. But all his efforts were in vain, and he sank down exhausted into the bottom of the boat. Presently he lifted his head.

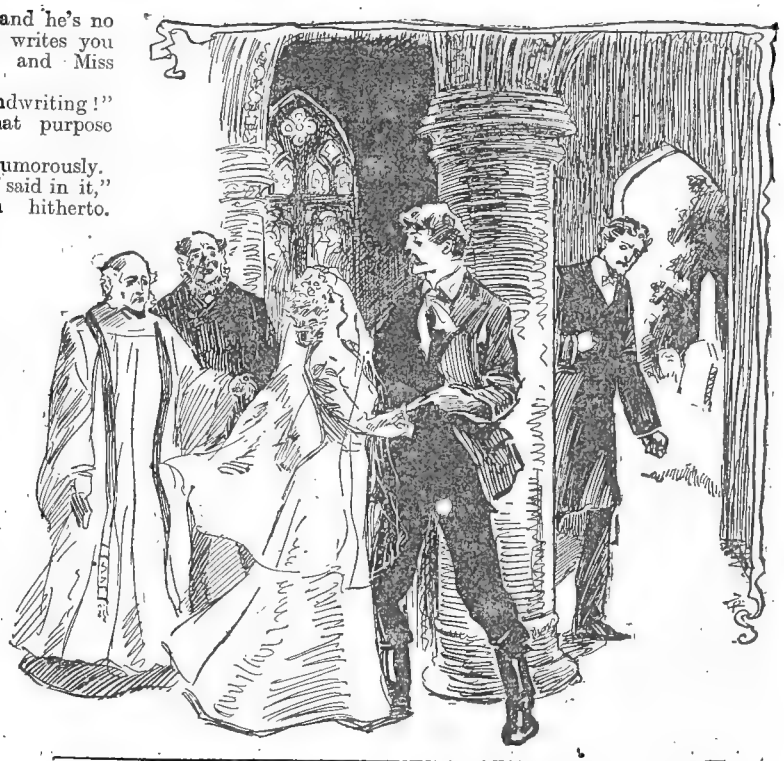
"And where is Malcolm?" he asked.

The man grinned and nudged his companion.

"Havin' a nice little chat with the lady, o' course," he said.

Norman groaned and lapsed into silence. And, the next instant, they ran alongside the fishing-lugger, and his two gaolers helped him on board.

They were not a moment too soon. Even as it was, the rigging snapped and the sails split, and the long timbers creaked and groaned in the hull of the straining lugger. And then the cable that held them at anchor broke under the strain, and the boat lifted her head high in the water and went tearing along with the wind behind her. Flash after flash of vivid light blazed out in the dark heavens, and peal upon peal of deafening thunder roared over the angry sea. Escape was useless now, and the crew, well knowing this, and needing all their energies to keep the boat from foundering, released his bonds and begged him to lend a hand.



Norman Hurst burst into their midst. With a glad cry, Muriel leapt into his arms.

Norman Hurst was known, all along that coast, as a cool and wise commander of such a craft as this, and, as the storm increased in violence, they implored him to take control of the boat. This he willingly and even gladly did, for he saw that the men, however capable as a crew, were powerless to navigate the lugger in such a sea. And he hoped, too, that he might be able to put the boat into port before they had run far along the coast. But, try as he might, he found this task hopeless. The great cliffs towered up along the shore, and he knew he dared not go too near. So port after port was passed, and all he could do was to keep the violently-pitching lugger above water, and hope for the morrow. Sea after sea dashed upon their decks, and the wind shrieked madly through the spars and the remaining rigging. Fear was in the faces of the two men, and, regarding the storm as a punishment for their share in the plot of their captain, they came, like the curs they were, to ask Norman's forgiveness. But he bade them sternly go back to their posts. So passed all that night, and death was very near them.

And then the morning dawned. But the sea still ran high, and it was not until nine o'clock that Norman, worn out with fatigue and hardship, ran the almost water-logged lugger into a little harbour, some forty miles from home.

* * * * * *

It was twelve o'clock, and the streets of the little fishing village were unusually gay. Animated groups stood at the street corners and round the old wooden capstans on the beach, and conversed excitedly together. And there was some reason for their excitement. For the past six months they had understood that Captain Warne's daughter was going to be married to the stalwart handsome, young fisherman, Norman Hurst. And now, on the very dawn of her wedding-day, a rumour had reached them that she had quarrelled with her lover, had sent him about his business, and was determined to go through with the ceremony, substituting in his place the man they all admired but nobody trusted—Ernest Malcolm.

There was quite a crowd round the porch of the little church where the wedding was to be solemnised. Eager faces peered in at the open doors and down the road in expectation of the carriages. And soon they came in sight. But the cheer which they had intended for the bride of Norman Hurst found no place on their lips now. Muriel, dressed very prettily in veil and wreath, alighted from the carriage and went into the church, which was already thronged with curious onlookers. She was very pale, and leant on the arm of her father, as if for support. She seemed to reel as she neared the altar, and, as Ernest Malcolm had not yet arrived, the officiating priest placed the vestry at her disposal. This offer she gladly accepted, and sank into a chair as soon as it was reached.

No notice had as yet been given to the priest that Ernest Malcolm was to be the bridegroom. He had heard the general rumour, but paid no heed to it. The banns had been thrice read out for Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne, and for that ceremony he was prepared. And the girl waited—waited almost in dread—vaguely hoping that Ernest Malcolm would not come, or, if he came, that he would bring the news of his failure to procure the special license which was to take the place of the one now in the priest's hands and make her his wife. All night long she had lain awake, thinking over the step she was about to take. And the more she thought, the more did she regret that rash promise, given in her pride of heart and against her better judgment. And all because

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she had confessedly been too great a coward to face the curious eyes of a multitude. But she had promised now, and to her a promise, even such an one as this, seemed sacred and binding.

Presently there was a stir in the body of the church, and the clergyman opened the door of the vestry. Ernest Malcolm stepped briskly inside and handed the priest a special license. The latter examined it gravely and turned to Muriel.

"Am I to understand," he said slowly, "that this is your will? Remember, there is no retreat when once you have taken your stand."

The girl looked dully up in his face.

"I have promised," she said.

"That is nothing to me," he said quietly. "It is to me you have to answer now—and—to a Higher Power!"

Muriel started.

"To a Higher Power! To God!" she said. "Then I cannot—I dare not do this thing! I was wicked—wicked, ever to have promised. Better a thousand times that I should endure to be humbled, than that I should give my heart, my love, to one man, and myself to another! Oh, set me free from this promise, I entreat you!" And she turned appealingly to Malcolm, who stood, with his arms folded, eyeing her disdainfully.

"And I?" he said mockingly. "It would seem that my humiliation occupies no place in your calculations. A convenient conscience, surely!"

The girl winced, and cowered before the cruel light that had come into his dark eyes. At that instant, a horse's hoofs were heard galloping outside, and the face of Ernest Malcolm turned pale. A moment later, and they heard a stir in the church and the voices of men and women in eager and excited conversation. The priest again opened the door of the vestry, and Norman Hurst, pale and dishevelled from exposure to wind and storm, burst into their midst. With a little glad cry, Muriel leaped into his arms.

"Oh, tell me," she said wildly—"tell me it is all a mistake!"

"Could you ever have doubted me?" he said reproachfully.

"But the letter?" pleaded the girl.

"Yes, I know," said Norman soothingly. "We have been the victims of a foul and dastardly plot."

Remembering the man to whom he owed a heavy and terrible reckoning, he turned suddenly. But Ernest Malcolm had vanished.

"Well," said Norman, "let him go. He will not trouble us more."

And then he turned to the mystified priest and good old Captain Warne, and explained to them all that had happened the preceding night. The congregation assembled in the little church grew very impatient at the delay. But at last the little group filed out of the vestry and approached the altar. Seeing their old favourite in the place of Ernest Malcolm, and momentarily forgetful of the sacredness of the place, they gave vent to a loud cheer. The worthy old priest raised his hand, and silence fell on all present. And then he read the words that bound Norman Hurst and Muriel Warne together for all time, and, though the years have sped by since then, no shadow has ever come to cloud their happiness or diminish the love they bear, the one to the other. And Ernest Malcolm, whose dark face was never again seen in the little fishing-village, experienced the truth of that old adage:

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip!"

Walter Mowbray.

A Girl to be Proud of.

Telling of the Rivalry between a Conceited Cad and a True Lover.

"I MEAN to marry a girl I can be proud of!"

Charlie Annesley looked at the speaker with a half twinkle in his eye.

"That sounds a bit priggish," said he.

"I don't know what the word means," said John Talbot-Winterson. He was very insistent upon the double name, and there were two things that invariably upset his dignity. One was to call him Jack, and the other was to omit the hyphen. But he was a very dignified person indeed.

"Mabel Masters is all very well," he went on to say, lighting a fresh cigarette carelessly.

"Mabel is the best girl I ever knew," exclaimed his friend, flaming up, "and you're not good enough to tie her shoe-lace."

John Talbot-Winterson smiled superciliously.

"I always thought," he said, "that you were love-sick in that quarter, Charlie. Now I know it."

"Bosh!" ejaculated his friend; but he coloured a little all the same.

"What can she do? She doesn't paint, ride, golf, play, or sing. She's an absolute nonentity."

"If you were not such an impossible man to pick a quarrel with," said Charlie, "I should certainly do so. I often feel, old man, that it would give me the greatest pleasure in life to kick you!"

Mr. Winterson smiled imperturbably. He might, or perhaps he might not, have known that there were many others who would have been delighted to kick him for his insufferable conceit.

"My dear Charlie," he remarked placidly, "life is too short to quarrel with any but one's enemies, and I don't believe I have one in the world. And I don't mind telling you that Mabel would accept me to-morrow, if I proposed to her."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. But I don't intend to."

"A month ago you were madly in love with her."

"Dear boy, a month to a man of my age is a very long time."

Charlie Annesley clenched his fists and ground his teeth. Often and often he wondered why he still both called and considered this man his friend. They had not a single taste in common, beyond that of—a month ago—admiring the same girl. But even in this matter their method of showing their admiration differed as widely as the Poles. John Talbot-Winterson patronised her, while Annesley, even more than he would admit, perhaps more than he knew, loved and worshipped her. He saw qualities in her that Winterson, with all his knowledge of the world, was absolutely blind to.

"She is rich," he remarked.

"Her father is," said Charlie curtly. There was a curious twinge at his heart as he spoke. Perhaps it was jealousy, for

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Talbot-Winterson was handsome and well connected, and he himself was plain and a nobody. Winterson was what is known as an accomplished man. He did a lot of things indifferently well, but in a manner calculated to, and which did, win him the admiration of the fairer sex. Charlie Annesley could do nothing. And he knew that in the world in which Mabel Masters moved Winterson was a fixed planet, while he was a very minor star indeed.

He had heard Miss Masters speak of Winterson. To her, no doubt, his conceit would appear cleverness, his priggish affectation the result of birth and good breeding. He knew she admired him, for she had told him so, in feminine unconsciousness that the words had been as so many daggers in poor Annesley's heart. What chance had he against so bright and shining a light as his friend? He was not exactly jealous of him, but there was that twinge of pain there all the same.

"Rather nice," said Winterson, with a languid air. "I half think I shall change my mind."

Annesley grunted. Some men would have sneered, but Charlie was not of that kind. He was almost too easy in disposition, especially where Mr. Talbot-Winterson was concerned. "Once a friend, always a friend," was his motto. A man with a little more determination would have kicked such a "friend" as Winterson long ago, and have resolved to have nothing more to do with him, and would have kept his resolve into the bargain.

When Winterson went, Charlie Annesley went back to his studio and began to paint furiously. But after a time he threw down palette and brush and lit another pipe in disgust.

"What right have I to think of her?" he said to himself, savagely, "a poor nobody of an artist in a shabby velvet coat and slippers down at heel. There's Winterson—beg his pardon, Talbot-Winterson—with his two thousand a year. And he says she is not a girl to be proud of! Oh, he's an ass—a full-blooded, concert-pitch, consummate ass! On his own showing, he knows everything, and yet he cannot see that she is a girl that even a duke could be proud of! She would make a most delicious duchess, and if I were a duke I'd make her one. If she'd have me!" said Charlie ruefully.

"I won't smoke any more. I'll go round, and—and get those sketches I left there last week!"

It was the moth and the candle, of course. Poor Charlie Annesley could no more keep away from the Masters' house in Westbourne Square than the foolish fluttering insect can avoid the glare of the light. He had only known Mabel Masters a little while, so was scarcely aware as yet of his own folly. But it was beginning to dawn upon him that she was dangerously attractive, and there was that twinge of the heart too. So Charlie Annesley went blindly on to his fate.

Miss Masters was at home, said the maidservant, and in a few moments she swept into the room, a tall, dark girl, with a shapely head well set on her shoulders, and a graceful carriage. She held out her hand unaffectedly to Annesley with a charming smile of welcome.

"Oh, what roses!" she exclaimed, at the sight of those to bring which Charlie had spent the price of a dinner at Frascati's. The very fact of his being tempted to do so ought to have told him of his danger.

"How good of you," she said simply, as she took them from him, with a smile that dazzled him. "I shall wear some of them to-night. We are going to the theatre with Mr. Talbot-Winterson."

Again that twinge of the heart.

"I hope you will enjoy yourself," he said; but he could not help thinking that it was hard lines that the girl he loved should wear his roses to a theatre with his rival beside her. The sting of this thought made him shorten his visit considerably. He felt he wanted to go away alone and think. Was he jealous of John Talbot-Winterson? He began to think he was.

Presently other visitors were announced, and he slipped quietly away with an adieu to Miss Masters. Mabel had fastened one of his roses at her throat, where her rounded chin just touched it, and this gave him a strange thrill of delight, and told him more of his own heart than he had known before.

"A girl to be proud of! Why," as Charlie Annesley said to himself as he walked down the street, "I am proud that she should wear my rose. I am proud of her!"

Then he suddenly stood stock still in the middle of the pavement, much to the astonishment of a passing small boy.

"I believe," he said, "I am falling in love with her!"

The thought troubled him. What chance would he have against his friend Winterson? Not the ghost of one. That lucky possessor of all the talents was rich, and Mabel was a woman who could never marry a poor man. Oh, the thing was an utter impossibility! But the discovery that he loved her troubled him as much as anything in the thirty odd years of his life had ever done, and he could not help thinking every now and again that evening of Mabel and—his roses.

* * * * *

It was just a month later when Talbot-Winterson dashed—so far as such a very refined and well-bred person could be said to dash—into Annesley's studio. There was, for a wonder, animation on his usually stolid face.

"Congratulate me, Charles," he said. It was, perhaps, typical of the speaker that he was the one man in London who ever called him Charles.

"Upon what?"

"My engagement."

"To——"

The name faltered upon Annesley's lips, but the other never noticed the slight hesitation.

"Yes. To Mabel. She is charming, and I really believe she loves me."

This was more than bearable. Annesley turned upon the speaker fiercely.

"You conceited ass!" he exclaimed, with more vehemence than he had ever shown in his life, "That's not the question! Do you love her?"

He almost demanded the reply, in the tone of an old-time highwayman asking for "your money or your life!" Even the usually imperturbable Talbot-Winterson was taken aback.

"My dear Charles——" he began.

"Do you love her?" his friend said once more. "A month ago you avowed her to be uninteresting, you asserted in this very room that she was not a girl you could be proud of."

"A month ago," said Talbot-Winterson, "was—well—was a month ago."

If ever Charlie Annesley came near to kicking, to say nothing of more seriously assaulting a man who professed to be his friend, it was at this identical moment, but he recovered his self-control with a great effort.

"I congratulate you," he said. That there happened to be an accent, almost so slight as to be imperceptible, on the "you," entirely escaped the notice of Mr. Talbot-Winterson. He simply smiled.

"Thanks," he said languidly. "I think we shall be awfully happy. I feel I deserve her after the unbounded attentions I have paid her during the last month or so."

"You conceited ass!" said Charlie. But it did not ruffle Mr. Talbot-Winterson one atom. His skin was too thick to notice the personality. Annesley picked up his brush and went on working with a furious feeling at his heart which only work could appease. His friend came to look over his shoulder, after he had in his affected, dilettante fashion, lit a fresh cigarette.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, as he saw the picture upon the easel, "it is Mabel!"

"Well!" said Charlie, as he turned, brush in hand.

"Have you—ah—her permission?"

"Yes, I have."

"And don't you think that under the—ah—present circumstances, you—ah—require mine?"

Nothing would have given Charlie Annesley greater pleasure than to have knocked the speaker down. He would have been sorry for it a minute after, but it would have done him so much good.

"Why?" was all he said

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"Well, of course you know. But all the same, I shall buy the picture."

"Will you?" said Annesley.

"I must. What do you want for it when finished—to my satisfaction, of course."

"To your satisfaction! Yours! What do you know about painting, you——"

"My dear Charles, don't get angry. I know nothing about painting, but I intend to purchase that picture when finished."

Charlie Annesley tore the canvas from the easel, and picking up a palette knife, slashed it into unrecognisable strips. He flung them in the grate. "There," he ejaculated, "it never will be finished."

For once in his life John Talbot-Winterson betrayed astonishment. Had he been less wrapped up in his self-conceit it might have occurred to him that Annesley, too, might admire—even be in love with the girl to whom he was engaged. But such a thing never came into his head.

"I must say," he began in his most dignified style. Annesley interrupted him.

"That will do!" he said. "If you say more we shall quarrel. There is the way out. You know it. You had better go."

And Mr. John Talbot-Winterson went.

* * * * *

When he had gone, and Annesley heard the front door close behind him, the painter threw down palette and brush, and sank into the nearest chair.

"That!" he murmured, with his head in his hands. "That! To think of—to imagine *that* having the right to kiss her dear hand when I, who worship her, should be afraid to put my lips to the hem of her gown. They are engaged, and he has the right to kiss her hand, perhaps her gracious lips—and I——"

It was probably the most bitter hour that had ever come into Charlie Annesley's life. Draw the veil over it. For even though one may love hopelessly, one never is quite without some faint lingering spark of hope. And poor Annesley was praying that he might never again see the face of the girl he had learnt to love so well.

In less than a week he had packed up, and had left London on a two months' sketching tour which he had had for some time in contemplation. It was the wisest thing to do. Something told him that if he met Mabel again he might say that which he might regret. So he left London and his love.

Wandering about the country he tried to forget the girl he could have been so proud of. Winterson had won her, he said to himself—pray that he, too, would be proud of her in the years to come.

Of set purpose he selected the wildest and most inaccessible regions he could find, places where London dailies less than a fortnight old were a rarity, and post offices unknown. He grew brown and was comparatively happy. But he did not forget. He filled page after page with sketches, tramped mile after mile over moor and wold. But he did not forget.

Happening to bivouac, so to speak, at a somewhat larger village than usual one night, he came across an old copy of a daily paper. Idly glancing through it a paragraph he came upon struck him like a blow.

"The suicide of Mr. John Masters. This particularly distressing event, which took place last week, was, it has transpired, caused by financial embarrassment. It will be remembered that Mr. Masters' dead body, shot through the brain, was found on Hampstead Heath. All rumours of foul play have now been proved erroneous."

Mabel's father! Charlie Annesley looked at the date. It was a fortnight ago. Then he had been dead three weeks. Oh, how his heart ached for the girl he loved. But then he remembered that she had Winterson to comfort her, only somehow he could not quite picture John Talbot-Winterson in the *rôle* of comforter. The part was one for which he would be totally unfitted.

The paragraph had the effect of shortening Annesley's tour considerably. In some vague way he thought that he might be of use to the widow and daughter. Anyhow, it would be a comfort to himself to be in London where they were, and he could learn more particulars of the affair from Winterson. Wherefore he turned his face to civilisation and the Metropolis once more.

Almost the first thing he did on arriving was to go to the Masters' house in Westbourne Square. Here he met with rebuff number one. It was empty, and a board announced its immediate sale by auction. Annesley made a note of the solicitors, and went to see them at once.

Rebuff number two. The solicitors only told him they were acting on behalf of the creditors, to whom Mrs. Masters had made over everything she possessed, except an annuity of fifty pounds a year which had been settled upon herself. Her address? Yes, they knew it, but at Mrs. Masters' express desire, it was not to be given to anyone.

"Not even to a friend?" said Annesley.

"To no one," was the reply.

This was a *cul-de-sac* indeed. There was nothing to be done but turn back. Then he bethought himself of Talbot-Winterson, and hurried off to his chambers. Rebuff number three—Winterson was away for a week. Annesley turned away disheartened. The enforced inaction irritated him. Of course Winterson would know where the Masters' were, thought he.

Fifty pounds a year! From luxury to poverty. And Mabel, with her queenly figure, her grace and beauty—how would she bear it? Bravely, Annesley knew, and with pride; and then he smiled, because he again recollected that she had Winterson.

"She won't want me or my sympathy!" he thought, bitterly. He tried to remember some mutual friends who might know of their whereabouts, but it was early autumn, and everyone was out of town. There was nothing to do but wait.

Slowly though it passed, that week came to an end at length, and Annesley again presented himself at Winterson's chambers. That gentleman, languid and affected as ever, received him with a sort of supercilious cordiality that annoyed Annesley. Something—love of Mabel Masters, perhaps—had opened his easy-going eyes, and he was beginning to see through the veneer that only partially covered his friend's character.

"Thought you were lost!" drawled Winterson.

"No, I'm all right. But what about the Masters'? Where are they? What a dreadful thing to happen!"

"Very! I don't know where they are."

"You don't?"

"Of course not. How should I?"

"But you were engaged to her?"

"I was."

"Are you not now?"

"Hardly. How could you expect a man of my position to marry the penniless daughter of a bankrupt suicide?"

"Then you broke it off?"

"I did," said Winterson. "Most decidedly."

"Then," exclaimed Charlie Annesley, "you are not only a coward but a blackguard! I've done with you. Don't speak to me; you're no longer a friend of mine. You're not even an acquaintance; we are strangers. I don't know why we were ever friends or how I have borne with you so long!"

"Very well," said Winterson coolly.

"I'll find her," cried Annesley, with a look of supreme contempt for the man before him. "I'll find her, and if she'll accept me, I will marry her to-morrow. You—you call yourself a man! You're a *thing!* I never want to see your face again. No, thanks. My hands are fairly clean. Anyway, I have too much respect for them, and too much contempt for you to touch yours!"

And Charlie Annesley flung himself out of the room furiously. When he contrived to cool down sufficiently to reason with himself, he realised that Talbot-Winterson had after all acted only after his lights. Had he—Annesley—only thought, he would have known that what Winterson had done was the very thing he would do. But Charlie Annesley had been too loyal to his friend—now friend no

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longer—to believe or think for a moment that he could behave so despicably.

He dismissed him from his thoughts and set to work to find Mabel Masters. He tried to think what she would be most likely to do. Would she try and earn her own living? But how? Charlie could not picture her as a clerk in the City; a typine. Even the stage, that refuge for so many suddenly plunged into poverty he could not bring himself to think of. He thought of almost everything; and nothing in his most wild flight of imagination came anywhere near the truth!

Before long old friends of the Masters came back to town, but none of them knew anything about them. It seemed to Annesley they had apparently disappeared from off the face of the earth. But, as he reasoned, it was only probable that Mrs. Masters had changed her name, and the chance of his happening to meet them in busy London was a very remote one. Still, he took to wandering about London suburbs in the vague hope that he might be favoured by luck. He was often deceived by a fancied resemblance, but up to one day in Spring, after a lapse of over six months, luck was not on his side.

That day in his life Annesley will never forget. He had wandered rather aimlessly to High Street, Kensington, thinking of Mabel Masters. Suddenly his heart stood still. His dreams had taken to themselves visible shape! There she was, as bright and beautiful as ever. Before he had time to realise that he had found her at last she had disappeared, swallowed up by the doorway of a pretty-looking milliner's shop. Annesley noted the name over the door. It was "Madame Vera." So he waited, with a beating heart. Five minutes, ten minutes, quarter of an hour. Then he summoned up his courage and entered. The shop was empty.

"The lady who entered a quarter of an hour ago?" said the attendant; "but there has been no customer in for longer than that."

Charlie explained.

"The lady was in black? Ah, but, no—that was not a customer. It was only Madame!"

"Madame?" echoed Annesley, not a gleam of the truth dawning on him.

"Surely—Madame Vera."

"Ask her if she will see me!" he exclaimed excitedly. But hearing a voice, Madame Vera had come out of the showroom and came forward to speak to him. It was Mabel Masters.

"So I have found you at last!" he said, in a voice tense with joy.

"I almost wish you had not," she murmured.

"But I have been seeking for you all over London, and I find you here!"

"Yes; this is mine. Let me tell you. When the crash came we—my mother and I—were left with only a little capital settled upon her. I could do nothing, I thought. But I hit upon one thing. I, even when rich, had always been able to make my own hats. It was a hobby, an amusement. Why not, I thought, turn a hobby to profitable account? But it was a struggle at first. Still, I have turned the corner."

"I honour you more than I can say," said Charlie, in a voice full of deep emotion; "and I thank God for letting me find you. May I come and see you?"

"My mother will be pleased, I know."

"And you?"

But Madame Vera disregarded this direct question.

"We have a tiny villa at Chiswick," she said softly. "Does it not surprise you to find me a working woman, after my butterfly life of a year ago! I am very happy, though," with a little catch in her voice, "and I can keep my dear mother in comfort."

"I can only feel two things," said Annesley; "that you are a girl to be proud of, and—that I love you!"

He bent over her outstretched hand, then lifting his eyes and read her reply shining in hers. Then he went out into the crowded High Street with a tumult of hope and joy surging through his heart

Clifton Bingham.

Your Editor Chats.

You have in your hands now, my dear readers, the number containing the beginning of our new series, "The Pursuit of Sara." Most probably you will have read every line of the absorbing instalment before you peruse these words, and that being the case, I feel confident that you are eager to ascertain what our heroine does after she leaves the offices of Messrs. Templeton and Co. Of course you cannot expect me to let you into the secret too much, so I will simply say that she makes haste to leave the turmoil of the Metropolis behind her, and, taking with her the precious documents which she is so pluckily guarding, flees to Bedford. Thence her pursuers, furious at being temporarily baffled by a girl, follow her, and——. But I am letting my enthusiasm run away with me, and if I am not careful, shall be telling you the whole of her adventures straight off. Therefore, all I can do is to advise you to possess your souls in patience, and to warn you not to forget to order next week's issue from your newsagent. In it you will find, graphically described, the story of her doings at Bedford.

Ere you have read many instalments of this vivid narrative you are bound to come to the conclusion that Sara is a girl of uncommon pluck, possessing a great quantity of that superb commodity, "British grit." You will, naturally, give me credit for inducing the young lady to publish her revelations, but I must own, that I, in my turn, am indebted to another. In the many years of my editorial career, I do not think that I have "discovered" a heroine in quite so romantic a way as I did Miss Gillespie, as she elects to be called during the progress of her story. Briefly, the facts are these. In the late summer I paid a visit to Bristol, and on my return occupied a carriage alone with a handsome, young gentleman. As a matter of course and sociability, we struck up a conversation, and presently exchanged confidences. I mentioned that I was an editor of a paper devoted to stories of love, and with a knowing smile, he said, "Love? There is nothing like the love of a true woman." I concurred with him, and he went on, "No, and no love romance has yet been written to compare with the one I know!" "What do you mean?" I asked, immediately interested. "I relate to the love romance of the best woman in the world, the woman who is now my wife!" And that's how first I came to learn of Miss Sara Gillespie who was; afterwards I got the gentleman to introduce me, and—the rest is apparent.

"The Snare of Gold," which has turned out to be one of the most popular serials we have ever had, comes to a dramatic termination next week. The interest in the plot has been sustained from start to finish, and I understand that many of my readers will regret its necessary conclusion. However, it will make way for a successor that will appeal to all of you who have a taste for exciting, as distinct from sensational, literature. The story will be entitled "A Criminal Millionaire," and is sufficient to show you that good things may be confidently expected. Mr. George Griffith, who is the author of this work, is another guarantee that the tale will be a strong one.

Your Editor.

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THE GIRL FROM LEON'S.

How a Pretty Waitress Found a Husband.

FIND me the city clerk, male or female, who does not know Leon's, the great refreshment contractors. Their restaurants abound in almost every part of London, and during the mid-day hours of twelve and two, are generally full to overflowing.

There you will see the young gentleman who that same evening will speak in languid tones of Prince's or Frascati's. There it is that you sit and study the remarkable list of Leon's restaurants, whilst you patiently wait for the Goddess in the Cap to finish her *tête-à-tête* with the young man with freckles and pince-nez. Should you endeavour to hurry her by ringing a bell or tapping on the table, you will doubtless regret it. She will favour you with a sublimely indifferent glance, whilst the young man will stare at you in an injured manner. Then you become conscious that this must be Mr. Leon, and the young lady, perhaps, Miss Leon; and, with a very red face, you ignominiously retire behind a newspaper.

Such is not always the case though, and if it had been, this story might not have been written. Why, I can point out scores of instances where people have been served in les than ten minutes from the time of giving their order.

Stuart Wray was in the habit of visiting the Leon's restaurant in the Strand every day, about two o'clock in the afternoon. After having dined elsewhere he would visit this particular restaurant for a cigarette and a cup of coffee, and to meet various acquaintances.

Naturally he came to know the waitresses, and would occasionally chat with them; for there were not many customers between the hours of 2.15 and four o'clock, when the tea rush starts.

It is the custom of this estimable firm of caterers to change their waitresses periodically; they do not, however, extend this plan to their bill of fare. Thus Stuart found that as soon as a girl got accustomed to bringing his coffee and particular brand of cigarette without being asked for it, she was moved to another branch. But this regrettable state of affairs did not deter him from his visits to the restaurant.

One of the men who accompanied him to Leon's of an afternoon was Guy Harding, his own particular chum.

"By Jingo, Guy!" said Stuart Wray, as they entered the smoking-room one afternoon. "What a fine girl that new waitress is."

He intimated an exceedingly pretty girl, of slender build, who was at that moment carrying a tray of crockery to be consigned to the rear regions.

"Where's our waitress?" he went on, as they sat waiting at a table.

"Shifted, I expect," grumbled Guy Harding. "Just when she knew my cigarette."

They waited for some moments until presently the aforesaid pretty waitress hurried up, her face very red. A more experienced girl had pointed out the two men patiently waiting at one of her tables.

"I am really awfully sorry," she began. "I did not see you waiting. Can I get you anything?"

Stuart glanced up in surprise, for the sweetness of her voice quite matched the beauty of her face. They gave their orders and the girl left them

"I say, Stuart, she's a lady," said Guy Harding.

"So I perceived, but still there is no reason why a waitress should not be a lady, is there?"

"I suppose not."

"Did you see her hands?" went on Stuart. "I should not think they have seen any rough work before. I wonder what made her become a waitress."

Here the object of their conversation brought the coffee and cigarettes. She paused, as though wishful to say something, and then, in a burst of confidence, she turned to Stuart, and said:

"I do not know how to do this; would you tell me if you pay for the cigarettes now, or whether I put them on the bill?"

The question somewhat surprised Stuart, and a momentary smile flitted across his face.

"You need not laugh at me," she pouted.

"Really, I was not laughing at you," Stuart hastened to assure her. "Yes, we pay for the cigarettes now."

"And double if you kiss them," broke in Frank Verden, who had come down since.

The girl flushed to the roots of her hair, and throwing an indignant glance at the speaker, went off without another word.

"Confound it all, Verden, that's a trifle too thick; you ought to apologise."

A roar of laughter greeted Stuart's remark, causing the other customers to glance round. Amongst those who looked at them was their waitress, and she flashed a look of thanks to Stuart, for it was easy for her to divine the cause of his angry expression and the shout of laughter.

He stayed down there a trifle longer than the others, for his office was within a few yards of the restaurant.

Suddenly he was conscious of the waitress clearing away the dirty cups from the table.

"It was awfully good of you," she said, with a smile, "to stick up for me against your friend."

"How did you know?" he replied, almost at a loss what to say.

"It was very easy to see. There are not many men down here who make rude remarks, are there?" she asked naively.

The quaintness of the question once more caused him to try to conceal a smile.

"Why, you are always laughing at me," she said in a disconsolate tone. "Am I so very funny?"

"Please forgive me," he cried. "I expect you *will* find a few of that sort down here."

"I suppose there are black sheep in every flock," she answered with a sigh.

"Oh, come," he said, as he rose to go. "You can hardly call them black sheep."

She ushered him out as though she were a hostess.

His thoughts were full of her for the rest of the day. She was strangely well educated for a waitress, and her manner was that of a well-bred girl. Clearly she had not long been in her present position. But he gave up puzzling over the matter from sheer lack of knowledge wherewith to conjecture.

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Some time went by, but this waitress was not changed as was the usual custom. Gladys, as the other waitresses called her, seemed a fixture, and Stuart Wray had quite come to look forward to the few minutes chat which they generally managed to have after his friends had departed.

* * * * * *

It was an evening in May. The weather had quite belied its ordinary reputation by being particularly fine.

Twilight had set in as Stuart Wray slowly strolled down one of the secluded paths of Hyde Park. He had been working rather late at the office, and a desire for a walk through the Park, before he left town, had seized him.

Presently he sat down, and filled his pipe. There was a strange sense of peace in his surroundings. The dark trees rustling in the cool breeze; the distant hum of the City with its weird glare in the sky; the waters of the Serpentine glistening in the moonlight.

Occasionally lovers passed down that quiet way, and a number of people gazed curiously at that solitary figure keeping a lonely tryst; for there are many who cannot understand the silent communion with Nature which a highly-strung organisation can hold.

Suddenly Stuart Wray sprang to his feet, and gazed after the retreating form of a girl.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It's Gladys!"

Then almost before he knew what he was doing, he found himself hurrying after her.

He touched her on the shoulder. Quickly she swung round, and faced him who accosted her.

"Why," she cried, with a glad little smile. "It's you."

They shook hands, and moved slowly along side by side.

"Supposing your friends saw you," she suddenly said.

"Well, supposing?" was his reply.

"Do you not mind being seen with a waitress?"

"Why should I?" he questioned. "If she does not mind."

"But then our positions in life are somewhat different."

"Maybe," he replied. "But Fortune is to blame for that. She is a fickle Goddess, and many that deserve never receive."

"That is a pretty way of paying a compliment."

"I never pay compliments," he said. "I only speak the truth."

There was silence for some time. The matter still seemed to trouble her, and presently she said:

"But what would people say, who knew you, if they saw you with a waitress?"

He gazed down into her face for a moment, and then indicating the masses of cloud that continually obscured the moon, he cried:

"There is your public opinion illustrated; always on the move, always shifty. Bah! I care no more for what people say than——". He paused, unable to find anything sufficiently contemptible to express his opinion.

"I wish I were a man," his companion interposed.

"Why?" he questioned abruptly.

"Because that is how I feel. But I am a woman, and I must bow before the decree of Society."

"Society," he echoed, in a scornful tone.

Together they strolled on, always talking; each finding the other more interesting as the time went on, until suddenly Stuart glanced at his watch.

"Why," he cried. "It's gone eleven."

His companion glanced up in dismay.

"Eleven o'clock! Good gracious! What will they think?"

It was on his tongue to ask who "they" were, but he wisely refrained. They hurried out of the park, and at the corner she insisted on him leaving her. In vain he protested, she was obdurate, and at last he boarded an omnibus for King's Cross.

Her name he had learnt was Gladys Tremlyn. It occurred to him that her education was almost equal to his own. More than ever, then, did he wonder what had brought her to take up the position of a waitress in Leon's.

"Are you not surprised to see me?" she said.

He haunted Hyde Park for some nights after this, but did not see her again. He hardly liked to ask her outright to meet him, until about a week after, when events forced him to.

"I am leaving here to-morrow," she said to him, as they stood chatting in Leon's.

"You are really?" he said.

"Yes, really."

"Going to another branch?"

"No," she answered. "I am leaving Leon's altogether."

There was a queer, tight grip at his heart, and a quick throbbing of his nerves, but he mastered himself in a moment."

"I am sorry to hear that," was his reply, and then suddenly becoming bold, he said: "I may see you in the park occasionally?"

"Well, it is a public place, isn't it?" she answered, but noticing the pained expression on his face she became compassionate, and said: "I shall be in Hyde Park this evening."

"Will you really?" he cried, and his face became bright again.

"Hush! You will have all the people looking at us if you speak so loudly."

"I am so sorry!" he whispered.

"Yes, I will be admiring the statue of Achilles at eight p.m.

"A very laudable occupation," he said gravely. "I, too, will admire Achilles at eight o'clock this evening."

That was the first of several walks they had in the vicinity of Hyde Park at eventime. He remembered how he trembled on one occasion when she caught his arm as a drunken man passed. It would have been a sorry thing for the morality of London had his subsequent wish been granted, for he devoutly hoped that each passer-by would be the worse for liquor.

All this time he had learnt very little of her life. He knew she had gone to live with an aunt at Chiswick, but she would never let him come to see her home. True it was that she had spoken once of having been well off, but he knew very

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little about her otherwise. But, as he told himself, that did not matter. He knew that he loved her, and knew her sufficiently well to be certain that nothing but good could appertain to her.

Then came one Saturday, a red-letter day in every sense of the idiom. He took her to Maidenhead, and they spent the day on the river. Several times the passionate words of love rushed to his lips, but he resisted the impulse to speak.

"She cannot be averse to me," he argued, "or she would not come out with me as she does. But then again, there is a deal of difference between liking a man as a friend and loving him." Then he would contemplate the bowl of his pipe with much gravity, and assure himself that it was a very serious matter.

This sort of thing occurred very often, until Gladys came to notice the effect it had upon him, and to comment on how bad he was looking. Never once, though, did she associate his worried appearance with herself.

Then the climax came, as it will come to all things. And, naturally, it is just on that climax that this story turns.

Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh had a very nice house standing in its own grounds at Hampstead. Mr. Vane Woodbeigh worked very hard to earn money, and Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh worked equally hard to spend it.

It had occurred to her that a "perfectly cha-arming" idea would be to have an open-air evening *fête* and concert in her grounds to which all the nobility and gentry that she was acquainted with were to be asked.

One of the chief guests was the Hon. George Kevill, a member of Parliament for a portion of Hampstead. It will be useless for you to look up a Parliamentary list, for I have carefully disguised his name.

To do Mrs. Vane Woodbeigh credit, or, more probably, the gardener, I must say that the grounds did look "cha-arming." Festoons of fairy lamps and illuminated lanterns hung everywhere, transforming the grounds into a miniature fairyland.

Stuart Wray's father and mother were amongst the guests, and he had accompanied them. To his intense astonishment almost the first person he saw in the grounds was none other than Gladys Tremlyn.

He caught his breath and let it whistle out between his lips in abject amazement. Whatever could she be doing there? She was very tastefully dressed, too. Ah! she had come down to sing. That must be it. She had mentioned to him once that she sang a great deal.

Quitting his parents' side with a hasty excuse he hurried after her. She was walking rather quickly towards a very unfrequented part of the grounds. Presently he caught her up in a sort of grove where none of the other visitors were. Suddenly she turned and faced him.

"I thought you would follow me," she said. "That is why I came here. Are you not surprised to see me?"

"Surprised hardly expresses it," he answered. "I suppose you have come down to sing?"

"Yes, that is it!" she cried eagerly. "Of course they do not know here that I have been a waitress at Leon's, and you——"

"No, I will not mention it," he broke in. "Why should I?"

As a matter of fact she was going to say: "And that was your father and mother that I saw you with, I suppose," but she accepted his interpretation of her remark with a little grimace unseen by him.

"You know I am glad to see you here," he went on. "I was not looking forward to this affair very much."

"Why, there are plenty of nice girls here," she replied, as she gazed up right into his eyes.

That smile maddened him for the moment, and his very soul was fired within him. Then, in the deep shade of the dark elms, and with her sweet face to inspire him, he put his hand on her shoulder and whispered:

"Gladys, I love you, dear!"

That was all he said. There seemed a lot more word somewhere but they would not come. All he could do was to repeat those words, in a passionate tone, again, and again:

"Gladys, I love you, dear."

There was no reply, but she slightly moved so that his arm incircled her neck, and then she shyly reached her hand up and pulled his head towards her. Their lips met, and they forgot all else in the ecstasy of their love.

"Gladys, are you here?" a voice suddenly cried.

Hastily they sprang apart, but the deep gloom of the trees prevented prying eyes from unnecessary observation.

"They want me—I must go!" she whispered hurriedly, and then aloud she cried:

"Yes; I am coming now."

"They are waiting for your song," came the answer.

And she went.

When he had assured himself that he was fully awake and quite sane, Stuart followed. He reached the lawn just as Gladys commenced the first words of "The Garden of Sleep."

He hung on every word of that delicious melody, sympathetically and beautifully rendered by Gladys' exquisite voice, till suddenly his shoulder was touched by someone. Turning, he beheld his father.

"Know who that is, Stuart?"

He gave a guilty start, and did not reply. Taking his silence as a negative answer, his father went on:

"That is Gladys Dewhurst, the great novelist. Is she not young to have achieved so much?"

"What!" Stuart almost screamed the word. Someone said "Hush!" and then Stuart drew his father away from observation.

"That Gladys Dewhurst?" he said. "Gladys Tremlyn is her name. What do you mean?"

"Oh, Tremlyn is her other name, is it? I knew it was Gladys T. Dewhurst."

"Good Heavens!"

Mr. Wray gazed at his son in astonishment. What had he said to produce this effect? Stuart was quite pale, and a strange light burnt in his eyes.

"Are you sure?" he said huskily.

"Yes, quite. She is a niece of the Hon. George Kevill, the M.P."

Muttering some excuse, Stuart hastily left his father, and walked blindly on with his thoughts all in a maze. Presently he found himself in that self-same arbour from which he had so happily emerged but a few minutes before.

"Gladys!" he muttered aloud. "Gladys!"

"Yes, Stuart?" a soft voice replied.

He turned and found her facing him. She started at the strange look on his face.

"Why did you not tell me?" he said.

"Then you know," she replied, her eyes downcast. "I was just going to tell you when they came for me."

"It's all over now!" he groaned.

"Stuart!" she cried, taking his hand as she spoke. "Stuart, why are you so upset? It does not matter at all; I saw you liked me a long time ago, and I—er—I liked you. Then I thought I would prove you by remaining as you had first known me to see if you would keep true. And you came out of the fire scathless."

He was still silent, and a troubled, anxious expression was on his face.

"I was at Leon's to write a series of articles on the life of a waitress, Stuart. Ah, dear, forgive me for my deception."

She placed her arms around his neck, and pulled his face towards her. He kissed her, and then put her gently away from him.

"I cannot marry you now, dear," he said. "You are fitted for a more brilliant life than I can offer you."

"I could have no more brilliant prospect in life," she replied, speaking slowly and tenderly, "than my life as Mrs. Stuart Wray. I love you, Stuart, and will never release you from your promise."

He gazed at her eagerly, the light in her eyes conquered him, and he took her in his arms.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Gerald's Four-leaved Shamrock.

A Pretty Story of Self-Sacrifice.

"A FOUR-LEAVED shamrock! If I could but find one!" said Grace, pausing suddenly in the midst of her song, and letting her hands fall from the keys of the piano into her lap.

"What is the special virtue supposed to reside in the fourth leaflet of a shamrock?"

"Do you not know that a four-leaved shamrock is a fairy talisman, giving its possessor an influence for good over all with whom he comes in contact? He can heal feuds, re-unite parted friends—in fact, be everyone's good genius. I think I shall look for one, Laurence."

"To what use would you apply your magic powers?"

"I would make your uncle relent, of course."

"I am afraid that nothing short of a fairy spell will accomplish that, Grace; reason has no effect whatsoever upon him."

"Have you been administering much of that article lately?"

"I spent more than an hour this morning in trying to make him see that after five years of hard work I have a right to a fixed salary, be it much or little. (We would be content with a little, would we not, Grace?) He will not admit my *right* to anything, but says that if I marry to please him, he will take me into partnership at once. As I do not, however, intend to gratify him in this respect, his liberal offers are not of much use."

"Did he name any particular person whom he wished you to marry?"

"Yes; Miss Blake, of Killora. It seems that he and old Blake have been talking the matter over after the manners of the farmers, and have come to an understanding concerning the number of cows and pigs, or their equivalents, to be contributed on each side."

"Alice Blake is a pretty girl and a nice girl, Laurence."

"She is almost the prettiest girl I know, but for all that I don't mean to marry her. Nor do I think the arrangement would suit her much better than it does me. If I am not much mistaken, she, too, has plans of her own. But while my uncle has the notion in his head, we sha'n't be able to make him look at things from our point of view. Try to find the four-leaved shamrock, Grace, and conjure up a little commonsense for my uncle. A very little would do. I must go now; will you come as far as the gate with me?"

And the two lovers sauntered out into the twilight and reiterated their last words at the garden-gate, leaving the pretty little drawing-room to its sole other occupant, Grace's cousin Gerald, a slender, fair-haired lad of about fourteen, who was lying listlessly on a low couch in the bow window.

Grace and Laurence had been playfellows for so many years that no one but the uncle of the latter felt any surprise when they appeared in the character of lovers.

Mr. Latouche, however, was thunderstruck at the announcement of his nephew's attachment to Grace Neville, and declared, in language of which he afterwards felt somewhat ashamed, that should Laurence persist in his determination to marry the daughter of a beggarly half-pay captain, he might bid farewell to his present home and future prospects at Glenallan Mills.

Laurence was quite dependent on his uncle, with whom he had lived from childhood; he had always been treated as a son of the house, and on his return from school, had begun to assist his uncle in the management of his flax mills.

He was resolved to marry Grace, and he had already begun to make inquiries as to the probability of his being able to utilise the experience gained at Glenallan Mills in obtaining a salaried post in some similar concern.

While Grace and Laurence were loitering in the garden Gerald was pondering over the only portion of the foregoing conversation intelligible to himself—Grace's jesting wish for the four-leaved shamrock.

Poor Gerald was but half-witted; his brain had been injured by a fall in babyhood, and had never properly developed. He was still a child in mind, with all a child's belief in the marvellous—a belief which Grace was chary of discouraging, from an instinctive feeling that his imagination was his highest gift, which, once weakened or destroyed, would never be replaced by reasoning powers.

She was very fond of him, and devoted much time and trouble to the work of training him, and drawing out what little intellect he possessed; while he, on his part, repaid her care with a passionate devotion, obeying her slightest wish, and following her about like a shadow.

He was also fond of Laurence, a ride on whose horse constituted his greatest pleasure; and, though quite unconscious of the reason, he understood, in his own dim way, that Laurence's uncle was angry, and that Grace was grieved.

Anger was a terrible thing to poor Gerald, who dreaded stern looks and harsh words as other lads dread blows.

Why, he wondered, did Grace want the four-leaved shamrock. An unwonted fit of shy reserve prevented his asking for an explanation when Grace returned, but he puzzled over the question at intervals during the night, and the wish for a solution of the difficulty guided his wandering steps the next morning to his old nurse's cabin, which stood on a green hillside, some three miles from his home.

The old woman was sitting on her door-step knitting, and basking in the sunshine. She looked up joyfully as Gerald approached.

"Master Gerald, wherever have you been?"

"I don't know, nurse," answered Gerald. "I must have been busy, I think."

"Busy," said old Joan; "poor lamb, sure it's you that'll never know what being busy means; all the better for you, maybe. Sit down there, an' I'll get you a drink of milk."

Gerald stretched himself at full length upon the grass, and began to drink the milk which Joan brought him in a little china mug sacred to his own use.

"How is Miss Grace?" asked Joan.

"I don't know," answered Gerald; "she is unhappy, I think. Her eyes were full of tears when she came in from the garden last night. She thought I did not see them, but I did. Nurse, what is a four-leaved shamrock?"

"A four-leaved shamrock, alanna? Why, a shamrock that has four little leaves instead of three."

"I know that. I mean, what is the use of it?"

"Well, people say it's a fairy charm that brings luck to the owner. Who was talking to you about it, Master Gerald?"

"Grace was singing about it last night, and she said that she wished she could find one. It had something to do with Laurence's uncle, I think."

"Ah, yes," said Joan. "I suppose Miss Grace thinks that if she had one, she could make things up between Master Laurence an' his uncle."

"And could she?"

"Who knows but she might? By all accounts there is wonderful power in a four-leaved shamrock."

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"I wonder if I could find one," said Gerald.

"Perhaps you might. Sure it's to the likes of you that the good people often send their gifts. Look for it anyway, alanna. 'Tis a pity to have Miss Grace fretting."

Henceforth poor Gerald's one dream was to find the four-leaved shamrock, which was to avert the anger of Laurence's terrible uncle and make Grace happy.

Accordingly he wandered about, day after day, telling no one of his purpose, haunting every meadow and every copse where shamrocks grew, seeking the magic quatrefoil destined to work such spells.

Such freaks of nature, however, though they do occur, are very rare, and Gerald's quest was for long a fruitless one. He had at first avoided the neighbourhood of Glenallan Mills from an unconquerable dread of meeting the terrible Mr. Latouche, whose stern face and iron-grey hair appeared to poor Gerald the embodiment of all that was awful.

At length, after days and weeks of patient search in other places, he so far overcame his repugnance as to go—in the early morning—to a large meadow through which the mill-stream flowed, and where the most luxuriant tufts of shamrock in all the country round were said to grow.

It was too early yet for the mill to be at work. The immense wheel was at rest, and a slender thread of rippling water flowed quietly on, giving no token of the force pent in by the sluices, and only awaiting a liberating hand to come rushing down and give life and motion to the slumbering mill.

As he neared the stream, which had steep, grassy banks, gay with many flowers, the great bell commenced ringing, and the workmen were trooping into the courtyard. He should abandon his search for that morning, since he would not risk a meeting with Mr. Latouche.

He was turning reluctantly away, when he perceived the object of his search—a leaf actually composed of *four* divisions, at the end of a long, trailing stem.

He lay flat down on the grass above, and grasping the herbage firmly with one hand, he stretched the other towards the prize. As he did so, the sudden barking of a dog, accompanied by a loud shout, startled him, and, losing his hold, he slipped down the steep bank into the stream below.

At the same moment the gates of the mill-dam were opened, and the pent-up waters, released from their prison, came seething and foaming down, seizing on poor Gerald's helpless form, and bearing him swiftly towards the certain destruction of the pitiless wheel.

The shout which had scared him was Laurence's, and the bark that of the latter's Newfoundland dog, Carlo. As the boy disappeared from view, Laurence ran forward, urging on his dog with voice and gesture, so that when he reached the bank he found Carlo already struggling with the stream.

To take off his coat and plunge in was the work of a moment. The dog's efforts had somewhat retarded poor Gerald's fate, and Laurence was thus enabled to seize him just as he was being drawn under the wheel.

A few long moments of desperate struggle, and Laurence found himself once more upon the bank, beside the apparently lifeless form of the lad whom he had saved, and whom he now, for the first time, recognised.

A little crowd of men had by this time gathered round him, one of whom, under his directions, carried poor Gerald into the house, and laid him on a sofa in the dining-room.

Mr. Latouche and his sister were summoned, and every effort was made to restore the boy to consciousness. When, after a long time, he opened his eyes, his first word was—

"Grace!"

"Do you want her, Gerald?" asked Laurence, bending over him.

"Yes," said Gerald. "I have found it for her at last."

"Found what?"

"The four-leaved shamrock."

And, opening his hand, he showed the little leaf which he had all through managed to keep safely inclosed within his palm.

"The four-leaved shamrock?"

"Don't you remember? Grace wanted it. She said that if she had one she could make your uncle forgive you."

"I remember," said Laurence, with a pang at his heart.

"What does he mean?" asked Mr. Latouche.

"I am afraid he must have overheard some jesting nonsense of ours about a four-leaved shamrock. You know it is said to be a talisman. May I bring Grace here, sir?"

"Certainly, if the poor child wishes for her. Take the pony-carriage."

Laurence hurried away, and in a little time the doctor, who had been sent for, came. He said that Gerald had received some injury, causing internal hemorrhage, and that his life was a question of minutes rather than of hours.

After a little time he opened his eyes and asked again for Grace.

"She will be here very soon now," answered Mr. Latouche.

He was standing a little behind the sofa, and Gerald was quite unconscious that the gentle tones to which he now listened were those of Laurence's terrible uncle.

"I am so afraid of being asleep when she comes," said Gerald. "I want to give her the four-leaved shamrock. She will be so glad to get it; she need not be afraid of Laurence's cross uncle any more."

"Does Laurence say that his uncle is cross?" asked Mr. Latouche, his face changing.

"No," said Gerald; "Laurence is very fond of him, and Grace says that he is good and that it is foolish of me to be so much afraid of him; but I think she is afraid herself, for she never will walk near the mills for fear of meeting him."

The sound of wheels was now heard, and a moment later Grace entered with Laurence.

She went straight over to the sofa and knelt beside it. When Gerald saw her, his whole face lighted up with joy.

"See, Gracie," he whispered, showing his prize, "I have found the four-leaved shamrock!"

"Oh, Gerald!" sobbed Grace, "I shall never forgive myself if my foolish talk has led to this."

"Don't cry about me," said Gerald. "I am not really hurt. Put your arm round me—so. Now I can go to sleep comfortably. You need not be afraid of Laurence's uncle any more."

"I would rather never have seen Laurence again than this should have happened," she cried passionately.

"Right," said Mr. Latouche, in answer to Laurence's look of dismay; "she is all the better worth winning for not being ready to fling old ties to the winds for the sake of her lover. How fond of her that poor boy seems!"

When Gerald next opened his eyes, Mr. Latouche, moved by a sudden impulse, bent over him.

"Gerald," he said, "I can promise you that your cousin need never again be afraid of Laurence's uncle."

"I know," said Gerald dreamily, "she will always be happy now."

"As happy as Laurence and I can make her."

Gerald smiled and closed his eyes.

After a time, Laurence, seeing how it was, took him from Grace's arms, and laid him back upon the sofa.

"It is best as it is, Grace," he whispered; "his life as he grew older could scarcely have been a happy one. Up to this you have made it so."

* * * * *

The four-leaved shamrock, inclosed within a golden circlet of Gerald's hair, hangs in a locket from Grace's watch-chain. Either by means of this, or of some other talisman in her possession, she has cast such a spell over Mr. Latouche, that no even Laurence himself is more devoted to her than is the stern uncle, to propitiate whom poor Gerald lost his life.

Rose Clifford.

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Compulsory.

CLARENCE: "How did Charley come to say he loved you?" Bessie: "Father asked him if he did?"

Brotherly Love.

TOM: "Do you think my cousin Julia would marry me if I asked her?" Jack: "Well, I have always considered her a sensible sort of girl—still, she might."

Thought He Was at Home.

"I TOLD George's uncle to consider himself at home in our house." "Well?" "Well, it wasn't five minutes afterwards that he began to grumble about the cooking."

Another Awful Catch.

"I READ an account of how a girl fell over forty feet without killing herself." "Good gracious! How did she do it?" "Tried to get out of a tramcar with exactly twenty men in it."

Better Left Unsaid.

HE: "What a lovely fan you have, Edith." She: "Yes, my papa gave it me. It came from Paris, and is hand-painted." He: "Indeed? And how nicely it matches your complexion!"

Love Will Find an Excuse.

BERTHA: "I fancy it's going to be a match between Maude and Arthur." Constance: "You don't say so!" Bertha: "Yes, Maude to-day spoke of his stuttering as a slight hesitancy in the enunciation of words."

She Had Her Hopes.

MISS ASCUM: "Wasn't that Mr. Bonds I saw you walking with last evening?" Miss Coy: "Yes." Miss Ascum: "He's a landed freeholder of the county, isn't he?" Miss Coy (blushing): "Well—er—he isn't quite landed yet."

She Saved Him Joyfully.

GLADYS: "That rich young Foodledum said if I didn't marry him he should die." Ethel: "Of course you accepted him?" Gladys: "Of course. I couldn't bear to think of the poor fellow dying like that; it's such a disgrace to die rich nowadays, you know."

A Jealous Maiden.

SHE: "Harry, you said something last evening that made me feel so bad." He: "What was it, dearest?" She: "You said I was one of the sweetest girls in all the world." He: "And aren't you, darling?" She: "You said 'one of the sweetest.' Oh, Harry, to think that I should live to know that I have to share your love with another!"

A Woman's Bargain.

MRS. ENPECK: "I think, Henry, that our daughter has made a very satisfactory marriage, and that she will succeed very well in the management of her husband." Henry Enpeck: "Why do you think so?" Mrs. Enpeck: "I overheard her talking to him this morning, and she got him to agree to a proposition like this: 'If you will do as I want, I promise to do the same.'"

Johnny Was a Flirt.

SCHOOLMISTRESS (in grammar lesson): "'I didn't have no fun at the seaside.' How would you correct this, Johnny?" Johnny: "Get a sweetheart."

Easily Satisfied.

MISS YOUNGUN: "What kind of a man would you like for a husband?" Miss Oldun: "Oh, either a bachelor or a widower. I'm not particular which."

Perhaps He Was Glad.

MOTHER (at a ball); "Are you enjoying yourself, dear?" Daughter: "I'm not." "What is the matter?" "I've refused George six dances running, and he does not seem a bit miserable."

Tit For Tat.

ELDERLY LADY: "All right, sir, I shall sue you for breach of promise." Young Man: "You'd better not attempt it. If you do I'll bring an action for slander against you for saying I proposed to you."

The Pursuit of Knowledge.

MRS. GOLIGHTLY: "Have you seen anything of Harry?" Major Golightly: "I heard him say something about going in pursuit of knowledge." Mrs. Golightly: "Ah, that means he is looking for the governess!"

That Terrible Boy Again.

"I DECLARE," said Bella sweetly, "your thoughts run exactly in unison with mine, Augustus. I had those very words in my mouth." "Yes, and I saw him put 'em there, too," said little Tommy, who had seen the kissing going on.

What Could She Expect?

MRS. HIRAM OFFEN: "Here, Bridget, see how dusty it is under the bed." Bridget: "Yes'm." "Haven't I impressed upon you that you must sweep under the beds?" "Av course, ma'am, an' how could the dust get there if I hadn't swept it under?"

Father Was Stern and Mabel Was Wild.

"MABEL," said little Jennie to her big sister at breakfast, "did you tell papa?" "Tell papa what?" asked Jennie. "Why you told Mr. Buster last night if he did it again you'd tell papa—and he did it again. I saw him!" And then papa looked at Mabel over his glasses.

Tricks of the Trade.

EMPLOYER: "You are having a decided flirtation with the girl who has charge of our telephone wire?" Truthful Clerk (with cold chills running up and down his spine, and with visions of instant dismissal): "Y-e-e-s, sir; but please, sir——" Employer: "Well, keep it up. She will give more attention to our calls if you do."

A Change in the Title.

MAUD (smilingly): "So you saw the profound bow I got from handsome Harry Brown? He's just graduated from an agricultural college with high honours as a veterinary surgeon." Ethel: "Yes, so Gladys told me. It's a secret, but she's engaged to be married to him." Maud (with sudden asperity): "Pooh! A cow doctor!"

Bread From a Stone.

"OH, we had the loveliest arrangement at our church bazaar last week! Every woman contributed to the missionary cause five shillings which she earned herself by hard work." "How did you get yours?" "From my husband." "I shouldn't call that earning it yourself by hard work." "You don't know my husband."

He Was Not Poetical.

"ALGERNON is very interesting," said the stockbroker's daughter. "What does he talk about?" inquired her father. "Why, he's ever so well posted in Shakespearian quotations." "Young woman," said the financier sternly, "don't you let him deceive you. Don't you let him make sport of your ignorance. There isn't any such stock on the market. I ought to know, for I've been on the Exchange long enough."

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..THE..

SUCCESS OF FIORNELLA.

A Tale of Magnificent Love.

"Oh, is it you, Arnold? Come in. This is such a happy day for me! Think; the play is finished!"

"But you, Roland, how is it with you? Is it one of your good days? But why do I ask? You are looking as if you had never known what illness was. Your cheek is red, your eyes sparkle. What has wrought this transformation? Finishing this play of yours? Oh, to feel an ecstasy like that!"

It was a small room in a quiet part of the town. There were flower pots in the windows, and the odour of the blossoms mingled faintly with the vague heaviness of a sick-room atmosphere. The furniture was neat; there were adornments of the sort that told of a feminine hand.

The sun sent a straggling ray of light through the white curtains, lighting up the face that looked out from the depths of the pillows. It was a boyish face, with a strangely beautiful mouth and curling lashes, veiling the eyes that were now so lit with ecstasy. Roland Stamford had lain upon that sick-bed for nine months, full of pain and hopelessness, yet now much of that anguish was forgotten, swallowed up in this beautiful joy, this complete, heavenly thrill.

Remember he had just completed his lifework! His play was written.

As for the visitor, whose name was Arnold Dilston, he was as unlike Roland as possible. He was in evident good health; prosperity shone from him everywhere; his good looks were marred by nothing of care or disease. His step was light, his voice cheery. He brought an atmosphere of youth and vigour into the dull atmosphere of this drooping life. When one is twenty-five, has perfect health, and an income that is large enough to allow a life of idleness, with only oneself to care for in the world, happiness is a near companion.

Arnold had taken a chair by the bed. He was watching the queer tricks of the sunlight across the white counterpane. A light breeze was coming in at the window, swaying the curtains gently.

"And now," he said—"and now that your play is finished, you will, will you not, tell us something of it?"

"Oh, yes. I would not speak before, you see, because I might never have completed it, and then what use would the hope have been! But now that it is done!" He said this last as if the words were very sweet to him.

"What is it, then, this play of yours? A comedy, a new *School for Scandal?* A——"

"No, no, Arnold, this is a tragedy. And such a plot! Oh, it is really beautiful. "You cannot fancy; you must read it; surely you will read it?"

"Of course, Roland. But—a tragedy! To-day at the very end, in the twentieth century! It is quite hopeless.

"If it had only been a comedy. They are all gone, you know, the people who look to the theatre for poetry, for inspiring words, and mental profit. We go only to be amused. Why have you forgotten this?"

"I do not seem to have thought of anything like that at all. I knew only one thing; this glorious thing was in me, and I had to deliver it to the world. And now what is the next thing. It must go to a manager and be read, I suppose——"

"Or not read." Arnold only whispered this in his thoughts. His lips said: "Yes, the managerial eye must scan these lines, and then—Well, I hope for the best. What is the best? Why, acceptance, and the announcement of the play's being put in rehearsal for early performance. And then; the test of publicity. Success. Wealth. But—it is a tragedy."

"Why do you say that so sadly? If you knew the stuff this tragedy is made of——! Besides, there is Jermayne."

"Yes, there is Jermayne. Have you written a part for her?"

"Not a part merely; it is the whole play. She is to be the all in all, the predominant character! Oh, my beautiful sister; how gloriously, how sweetly you will play this part. It will bring you fame! Oh, Jermayne has read the play. She loves her part already; she realises it."

"But her present contract? She is so successful at the Trafalgar Theatre."

"Her present contract expires soon; then—ah, yes, then—she shall play Fiornella. It is true that she has a delightful position in Weekman's Company; and yet—there is but little fortune for her. Whereas—as *Fiornella!* Oh, think! There will be nothing sweeter in all the world than Jermayne as Fiornella! If I can only live until that day!"

He closed his eyes in a transport of imagery. Then he went on:

"And you, Arnold, will you take this precious child of mine, this "Fiornella," and take it to the managerial eye? You know some of those people, do you not? You will do this for me? Besides—there is Jermayne."

"Yes," said Arnold, as he took the neatly-wrapped sheets of manuscript, and got up, pushing his chair back gently, "I will do my best, my very best. I hope for the pleasantest things."

"Besides—there is Jermayne——"

Arnold's eyes grew very tender; and he bade good-bye.

* * * * *

"And so they have all refused it?" It was Jermayne speaking; Jermayne, the beloved sister of *Fiornella's* author. She looked at Arnold wistfully, hoping that he might acknowledge that there was someone still untried, some channel open.

Arnold nodded, with pain in his eyes.

"All, all. There is no one else, absolutely no one."

"Oh, it will kill him! It will kill him! My poor brother, poor Roland!"

Her eyes grew dim and she looked into space.

"Is there no way at all, no other way?"

"Yes, there is another way. And Roland shall live, if it depends on *Fiornella.* You see, if the expenses are all guaranteed—almost any manager will take the piece. He risks nothing. The backer risks all that. Well—I will back it. I have a thousand pounds. That will put the piece on the boards. After that—who knows? It may be a great epoch-making triumph. I may," he spoke as if he really believed it, "make a fortune. And you—a splendid fame. And Roland—why, the mere joy of it will be enough for him."

"Oh, but you must not do this. Think, your fortune cast upon one die. If the piece fails——"

"I am a beggar." Arnold smiled as if that prospect were sweetly pleasant. "No, no, it is a very commonplace matter. It is just as if I were buying railway stocks. I may win, or I may not. No one knows. To-morrow I might have speculated it all away on stocks and shares. Instead, I shall stage *Fiornella.*"

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He spoke, this splendid young man, as if he had always had the Stock Exchange fever in his bones. Whereas he had never——But what would a young man not do for a girl like Jermayne?

"Yes," he went on eagerly, "Roland shall get well from very joy. You shall play Fiornella, and *Fiornella* shall succeed! See, I stake my word upon it. Now, go and tell Roland that Weekman has decided to put *Fiorniella* in rehearsal, and that he agrees to the stipulation about you playing the title-rôle. It is a lie that the angels will forgive you. Good-bye, Fiornella."

Jermayne's eyes got very dim.

"Oh," she said chokingly, "how shall we ever——"

But Arnold lightly kissed her fingers and left her.

* * * * *

The curtain went down on the closing scene of *Fiornella*, but the tumult of applause would not down. It never lulled at all, until Jermayne, flushed still from her great *finale*, appeared and bowed, looking like a sweet and gracious queen. And then the storm broke out anew, and there were cries, mingling finally into one compact call, of "Author, author!"

Has there ever been a more touching scene, I wonder, than that of Roland Stamford, lying at full-length in an invalid's chair, being wheeled to the centre of the stage by that beautiful Fiornella? The crimson on his cheeks was very sharply defined against his whiteness, and he looked beautiful—beautiful as Death. He spoke at last, and the silence out in front was almost an agony.

"You are very kind," he said; "I thank you. This—is what I have lived for."

Then his head sank down, and faintness came upon him. *Fiornella* was a success! A magnificent triumph! Who, with that thunderous applause still ringing in his ears, could doubt it. And yet, as each auditor went away, he looked at the other, guiltily, and as if he were ashamed.

As for Roland, when he was safe in his home again, he held quite a reception about his little bed. There were many great men there, men whose names we read of in the personal columns of the papers. And, of course, Weekman was there, and Arnold, and Jermayne. Roland looked, oh, so happy! He talked brightly, brilliantly; the young genius was at his best. The others listened and laughed, and made the boy forget his illness and everything but success. Only, from time to time, they exchanged furtive glances. And when they went away, each, as he shook hands with Roland, and then with Arnold, looked as if he had done something unworthy.

"Oh," said Roland, when he was alone with Jermayne and Arnold, "this is beautiful! Life, how glorious you are. Oh, you doubters! Did I not tell you of this, long ago? And see—it has come to pass!" He turned, smiling, to his pillows, and passed into slumber.

The doubters looked at each other, and the laughter died away from their faces.

* * * * *

It was ten days after the night of *Fiornella's* success. In Roland's little room it was quite still. Outside the sun was going down in salmon-hued splendour. In the outer room were Arnold and Jermayne, and sadness was upon both their faces.

The door of Roland's room opened gently and the doctor issued.

"Well?" said Jermayne.

"Can he live?" asked Arnold.

"He cannot live two hours." The doctor spoke softly, fearing to wound. But there was no hope in his decision. He left nothing, nothing to cling to. "I have done my best," he went on, "but he is ebbing away. There is nothing to be done." He passed out, leaving Jermayne and Arnold to their sadness.

And so it had all availed nothing! Every day the reports from the theatre had been brought to the invalid's couch, the criticisms had been read to him. The doctor had told them that the only hope was in keeping him cheerful and happy. Well, they had done that, at all cost, and now——

Arnold thought a little bitterly of the uselessness of it all. What a magnificent effort it had been! How well the mockery had been kept up! Only to keep Roland in happy content with success, that had been the end of all; that had succeeded, but——

"As literature," Arnold was reflecting, "*Fiornella* was beautiful, majestic. As a drama it was impossible, because of its very beauty and strength. We can't stand genius on the stage; we are grown domestic, even in art, and we worship the commonplace. *Fiornella* was anything but commonplace, and, therefore, predestined to fail. But there are ways and means known to the wily men of the "profession" by which a failure may appear, for a little while, to be a success. The magic wand is composed of bank-notes. Judicious 'paper,' a clever press agent, and a potent wand; these will keep any play afloat for awhile. It is so easy to get a 'house' on a first night! And newspaper columns may be bought at no unattainable figures. Critics are amenable to good wine. But—it certainly takes money. It—has—taken money."

Still musing in bitterness, Arnold went into the next room. Jermayne was there before him, at Roland's side. Roland was already growing unconscious. How beautiful he looked. His eyes rested upon Jermayne and Arnold.

"Ah," he murmured," "you must bid me good-bye, you two, I am going—away. But I am quite happy to go, now that *Fiornella* is making a name for me. Oh, the sweetness of that success. Yes, I think, up above, I shall have a theatre, and they shall always play *Fiornella*. Though, of course, we must wait until you come, Jermayne. And I hope that will be a long way off. I can wait a very long time for you. Well, I must say good-bye. I hear the call-boy.

"It will soon be my—cue, and I will have to—go on—up above. Give me your hands—both of you. So." He laid Jermayne's right within Arnold's right, and smiled up at them both. "It is so, is it not? I have always wanted that, also, and I have got it. How good God is! I have everything—everything to make me the most happy creature. And now—will you—both—kiss me?"

They stooped down and touched their lips lightly to his. Then, in another instant, a slight trembling came over Roland's form, a faint sigh came from between his lips, and—it was the end. But there remained upon his face such a smile, such a look of perfect peace and happiness, as made you feel that death was very gentle with him and loved him, as all had always done.

All the bitterness had gone from Arnold.

"To have seen that perfect happiness," he said, half to himself, half to Jermayne, "was worth twice as much."

Jermayne looked up through her tears.

"Is it all—gone?" she asked, very softly, as if the dead might yet hear.

"Every penny of it."

He spoke cheerfully, as if he were rid of that paltry wealth.

"And you are a beggar?"

"H'm—yes. But——"

"Well?"

"I have you." He drew her to him, and kissed her tear-wet eyes. "Besides," he went on proudly, "we are both young. We have youth and love, and happiness is with us." His eyes rested upon Roland's smile.

Percival Pollard.

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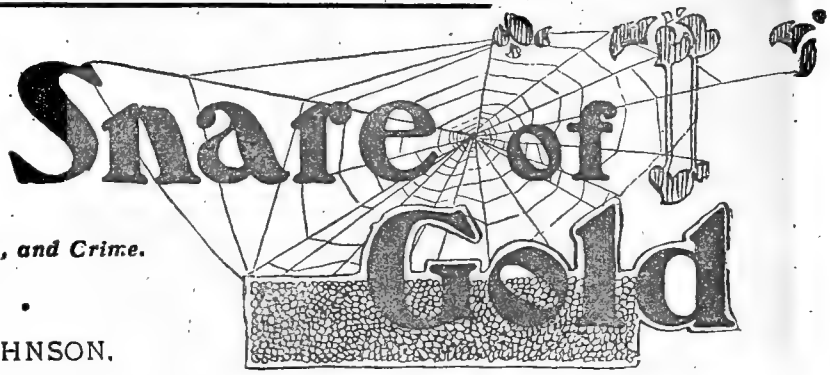
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

• • By • •

HENRY T. JOHNSON.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

GEORGE GELDART, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

ERIC GELDART, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He then enters Parliament, where he forms a new party.

RONALD GELDART, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

CLARE ARMITAGE, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who was betrothed to Eric, who now scorns her love.

BOANERGES BLAGDON, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

SAMPSON SCRIMSHAW, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery," by whose assistance he is successful in endeavouring to become an M.P.

MR. STANYER, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

MADELEINE LORRAINE, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric, but who loves "Harvey Bligh," the popular author, really Ronald Geldart.

PHYLLIS DAVENTRY, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

JACK WIDDICOMBE, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who occupies a responsible position on the *Meteor*.

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.
Ronald is Arrested.

"I SEE you've met before," Lady Alastair said in a delighted tone, for she was the essence of amiability. "I am so glad, I'll leave you together," and so saying, she sailed away to bring other interesting young men in touch with other interesting young women.

"You are not vexed with Lady Alastair?" said Ronald, "Because she did not know, and, of course, if you would rather not speak to me I will leave you without another word."

She looked up piteously into his eyes.

"No, no!" she said, "only I should like to speak to you alone," and she looked around as though in despair at the smiling, chattering throng near them.

He led her to the marble staircase and across a domed, mosaic-paved staircase head towards one of the conservatories, where mostly pink and white azaleas bloomed. And she seated herself in a wicker chair in the ambush of branching palms and greenery.

"I want to tell you," she said, as he seated himself beside her, "how sorry I was, how angry with myself for leaving you without a word. It seemed so unjust because, whether your brother was right or wrong in what he said, you had always been so brave and kind to me, and——" she looked down at the jewels on her wrist, "we had always been such friends."

"I am glad you have said what you have said, because it gives me the opportunity and the right to speak," he replied. "The accusation of that man—I never more will call him brother—was a foul, false slander. It is true that prior to my father's death an unjust and cruel suspicion fell upon me. Only yesterday I discovered his machinations.

"Madeleine, my good name and fame are dear to me. I dropped the name that is mine by birth until such time as I could clear it. For a time I had no means to clear it, for I could not believe, still less prove that any man, let alone my own blood brother, could contrive a scheme so diabolical and dastardly as that which Eric Geldart laid against me."

"Brother against brother," murmured Madeleine, horror in her eyes.

"Yes, brother against brother. He plotted my ruin for the one reason that he might shield himself and his own offences behind the rampart of suspicion that he heaped on me. That and one other motive swayed him; the lust for gold, the hunger for my birthright as well as his own, and the mad, hateful design of gaining all my father's fortune, banishing me from that father's confidence, from his heart—ah! at the cost of breaking that heart, or, as it proved, of sacrificing that useful, honourable life."

"Harvey! Harvey!" she cried, calling him by the name she had known and loved him by.

"It is true, true what I have told you. Soon it will be proved. But I have something more to say, Madeleine. Even in my darkest hour, when there seemed no rift in the black cloud of suspicion that loomed over me, one dread was worst of all, one yearning most intense—the dread that you should hear and think me guilty, the hope, the soul-felt hope, that you should know me and declare me to be true."

"Then," she cried, "God grant that you may rend asunder and destroy the mantle of suspicion that has shrouded you, but whether you succeed in that or no, this from my heart I do declare: 'I believe you innocent, and I—I—I love you!'"

He caught her in his arms, rained kisses on her face. Locked in each other's embrace they were oblivious to all the world, oblivious to an approaching form, oblivious to the presence of one who stood regarding them like a Mephistopheles raging at the bliss in which he had no part.

And Eric Geldart, seeing what he saw, hearing what he heard, banished from his black heart all semblance of pity or remorse, all thought of ties of blood or kindred, forgot that once the brother there and he had slept, infants in their cot, folded in each other's arms, the same mother's kiss upon their brow, the same mother's prayer murmured over them, remembered only that the man there stood between him and his heart's desire, and that he might win the love he craved and keep the gold he craved and the fame and reputation which were as the breath of his nostrils. The man there must be crushed and broken, once for all.

Turning from their rapturous embrace, the lovers faced

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him, but this time intensifying not relaxing their clasp of each other's arms, and with scorn and defiance in their eyes.

"I must apologise," Eric sneered. "for interrupting a scene so charming and so interesting; a rehearsal, I presume, for Lady Alastair's forthcoming amateur theatricals—Romeo and Juliet, or Paolo and Francesca?"

"I care no more, sir, for your sneers than for your slanders," said Ronald sternly, "your presence is an intrusion!"

And Madeleine echoed simply: "Yes, an unwelcome intrusion!"

"An intrusion—yes!" he hissed between his set teeth, while his eyes flashed like lightning under the thunder of his brows; "but there may be other intrusions than mine, and they, too, may be unwelcomed. Yes! yes! this way—this way!" and as he turned he called to two stern-looking men who were peering to right and left, followed by the affrighted Lady Alastair and a handful of her guests wide-eyed.

They strode hastily to the conservatory.

"Who is this?" said one close black-bearded man; then indicating Eric, "Is this the man?"

And Lady Alastair said:

"Oh! no! no! no! I am sure it is all a terrible mistake; you have no right to come here, no reason to come here—that is Mr. Eric Geldart—not Mr. Ronald Geldart!"

"But, my lady, the other?"

"Why that," she cried with triumphant indignation—"that is Mr. Harvey Bligh, the novelist; is it not so, Mr. Geldart?"

And Eric answered, hurling an accusing hand towards his brother and speaking to the stern, strong executants of the law:

"That is my brother, Ronald Harvey Geldart, author, poet, whatsoever else he may be, my brother and—a thief!"

A murmur rose from the trembling and now augmented throng, who looked on thrilled and petrified with horror.

"A thief!" whispered one. And another in a whisper answered: "Yes, and something else!"

And he of the black beard, advancing, said:

"Are you Ronald Harvey Geldart?"

"I am," was the unflinching answer.

"And I am Inspector Donnelly of Scotland Yard, and it it my duty, Mr. Ronald Geldart, to arrest you on the charge of the wilful murder of Clare Armitage, and I have to warn you that anything you may say is liable to be used in evidence against you." And in another moment Ronald Geldart stood between the two stern officers of the law, who, each with a hand upon his wrist, led him from out those marble halls, speechless himself with horror and amidst a silent horror of all who saw and heard.

TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

Jack is Made Happy.

"Good morning, Miss Phyllis!" and Mr. Scrimshaw's Remington promptly ceased its chatter as was its way when Mr. Scrimshaw's typine was about to commence hers.

It was Mr. Widdicombe who interrupted the operations of the young lady operator, in fact these interruptions had of late become frequent owing to various causes.

The *Meteor* was increasing in circulation and importance, and there was more urgent and frequent need for its business manager to confer with its actual, though unsuspected, proprietor.

Again, the attendance of that proprietor in Crosby Square had of late been more urgently and continuously required. Not by the exigencies of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange, the affairs of which indeed Mr. Scrimshaw delegated more and more to his cashiers and managers, devoting a daily, increasing portion of his time and energy to conferences with the strange old man in the dreary office upstairs, and the bustling, hurry-scurry of various dealings, transactions and operations following such conferences.

The staff of the Cosmopolitan were mystified. They knew that business, important and lucrative, appertained to the association of their handsomely-furnished and appointed offices and the somewhat squalid and dreary floor above, knew that it was not for nothing that huge budgets of accounts, almost cabalistic in form and contents, were sent down to them to be copied, and that in other cases balance-sheets relating to the most ordinary operations were directed to be filed upstairs.

Clearly the governor was working a big scheme, and Old Mystery, whom daily the staff of the Cosmopolitan treated with more respect and deference, was in the swim.

Certainly Mr. Widdicombe made these frequent visits to Crosby Square without complaint, and when occasionally Scrimshaw incidentally excused himself, on the ground of pressure of business, from attendance at the *Meteor* offices, the business director of that paper would remark cheerfully:

"Don't mention it, Scrimshaw, we're getting along much better without you—we'd rather not be troubled, I mean to say we'd rather not trouble you, knowing the demands upon your time made by your Parliamentary duties, to say nothing of the necessity of your being here in the City with all this alternate boom and panic in the air."

There was another reason, one that Mr. Widdicombe never mentioned. Fortune had of late smiled on him more consistently than ever he remembered.

His emoluments from the *Meteor* made the hard times of the past seem like a dream. In addition, Scrimshaw, from time to time, had, in his off-handed manner, given Cousin Jack, his old-time befriender, hints and tips of which the latter had availed himself to his substantial benefit.

And yet, strange to say, Jack Widdicombe of late felt lonelier than ever. Indeed, he dated that sense of loneliness back to the moment when he first set eyes on Phyllis Daventry, and strove in a manner, strangely shy and off-handed for a man of the world, to impress the fact upon her.

Did Phyllis catch his meaning? It is difficult to say; certainly she more and more affected not to, which inclines me from observation to believe she did.

Idylls are not all dependent on environment. Of what avail the flowing meads, the rippling streams, the summer zephyrs and the skipping lambs without a Chloe and a Strephon?

But set you down your Strephon and your Chloe in the very vortex of the City's maelstrom, with nothing more pastoral near than the bulls and bears and stags of the Stock Exchange, no verdure closer than in Drapers' Gardens, the Fountain Court of the Bank of England, or the plane tree in Cheapside; rob your Strephon of his crook, replace the silk stockings and the satin-bow-tied breeches he wears in China ornaments by a frock coat and chimney-pot silk hat, give him a silk umbrella for a crook and let your Chloe's curls be crowned, not by a garland of wild flowers, but by a picture hat, and for a smock array her in a blouse and skirt, yet shall Strephon whisper the oldest and the dearest of all stories, and all shall be Arcadian.

"Don't you get tired of type-writing?" asked Jack incidentally.

"Oh, no!" said Phyllis, "it's my work, and it's better than governessing or envelope-addressing or sewing-machining, and I'm not clever, you know, like girls who write or girls who go on the stage."

"Aren't you, by Jove!" said Jack stubbornly, and gazing angrily at a hand mirror which happened to be present, there being a daughter of Eve within the radius of a hundred yards, and which insultingly threw back at him the reflection of streaks, mocking streaks, of white above his temples. "I'd sooner listen to you than I'd read or hear any of them."

"Oh, Mr. Widdicombe, and what message did you say for Mr. Scrimshaw? I'm rather afraid it isn't much use your waiting."

"And why?"

"I doubt if he'll be back this afternoon."

"I don't see that that matters much, if I may only wait."

"If it isn't wasting your valuable time, Mr. Widdicombe," said Phyllis demurely.

"I don't think my time could be better employed; certainly not more enjoyably. Allow me," for a sheet of paper fluttered

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from Misss Daventry's table; and gallant Jack Widdicombe stooped to restore it, then he stared at it, ejaculating, "By Jove! that's strange!"

"What, Mr. Widdicombe?"

"That handwriting. May I look, I don't want to read the contents."

"Oh, certainly, if you like, it doesn't matter; they're Greek and Chinese combined to everybody except Mr. Scrimshaw and the gentleman who wrote them. I can't understand their interesting you."

"They don't, the contents, but the hand, it's as like the writing of a man I once knew as if it were his own—the same quaint tails to the g's and y's and the same twiddley little s's."

"How strange; perhaps it is."

"That can't be; the man I mean is dead."

"Then they are not the same," said Phyllis, "for this one is very much alive."

"What's his name?"

"Strange to say, I don't know, but he's a dear old gentleman and I like him very much. He belongs to the office upstairs with the Taga-Taga Wool Agency on the door. We call him Old—I mean Mr. Mystery, and Mr. Scrimshaw gives him odd jobs to do now and then—little matters that he wishes to keep outside the office, though, as a matter of fact, of late he has kept him quite busy. He seems to have quite taken to him."

"So do you," said Mr. Widdicombe in an injured tone. And Phyllis answered:

"Oh, certainly, he's such a dear old gentleman."

"I'm glad he's old," said Jack, "though, for the matter of that, I'm not getting younger," and he passed his hands ruefully through the iron grey hair thinning so rapidly at the temples.

"Oh, Mr. Widdicome, you're in the prime of life!" and the delighted Jack replied:

"Do you think so? Well, really, when you come to think of it you're not far out." For it is noticeable that men, as a rule, go on considering themselves in the prime of life from thirty-five to sixty. "But, ah!" he sighed, "I'm a great deal older than you."

"Yes," said Phyllis, going on tapping, "but then men are much younger in their ways than women all the way through."

"Do you think so? It has often occurred to me. For instance, for a man of thirty a girl of twenty would be the most natural thing in the world, and lots of men at forty marry girls of twenty."

"Oh, yes!" said Phyllis, typing furiously.

"By-the-bye, if it isn't a rude question, how old are you, Miss Phyllis?"

"I'm twenty-five," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Really, you don't look it," said Cousin Jack, who would have said that whatever she had said. "Well, I say, Miss Phyllis, if a man of thirty is young and a man of forty is not too old for a girl of twenty, why—why——" He paused, the better to elaborate his rule of three sum, "for a young lady of twenty-five a man of forty-five would be just about the age.

"What age?" asked Phyllis, with amazing innocence, and Jack exclaimed:

"The age to ask you, Miss Phyllis, if—if—you'll save a poor fellow from developing into what he's on the verge of—a lonely, dreary, weary, selfish old bachelor. I know I'm not much to look at. I'm neither clever nor rich, also I'm past my prime, and there are dozens of smarter men, younger men, who'd give the world for a smile from such a pretty girl as you, but I love you very, very dearly, and I'll be good and true to you all my days."

He seized her hand—he was seated beside her. Her lips trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

A hundred thoughts flashed through her mind, she thought of herself as she was, happy in herself, happy in her work, but fatherless, motherless, without brother or sister, and at times feeling very, very lonely, thought of herself as she pictured what she was to be, a prim little old maid going home to a prim little sitting-room of an evening, with the prim tabby cat singing on the prim hearthrug, and the spring-time coming and going and the autumn bringing more dead leaves.

And then—and then—there flitted for a moment in her mental vision a handsome, grave face, a well-set figure, a voice that woke music in her heart, and then—and then, she put that picture by—for ever. And there in the City's heart the little idyll was enacted, and Cousin Jack, somewhat late in life, plucked and laid upon his heart the flower of womanhood that was to make his whole life fragrant.

And through the open window there floated from below a harmony of strings—a harp, a violin, a 'cello. Bustling City men paused just a moment, and a few drones there in the City hive loitered awhile to listen to the wandering minstrels who played on and on, little deeming they were furnishing the incidental music to a real life drama that had reached its happiest situation.

Cousin Jack, with a light heart and the footstep of a schoolboy, all but cannonned with his patron when descending the stairs.

"Do you want to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, out with it."

"Only just to ask if you can spare your typewriting young lady."

"What for, and for how long?"

"Permanently."

"No, you be hanged! the *Meteor* office is quite distinct from the Cosmopolitan Trust, and mustn't steal its staff."

"But she isn't for the *Meteor*, and I don't want her to typewrite any more; I want her for a semi-detached villa in the neighbourhood of Streatham, and I want her for my wife."

"By Jove!" said Scrimshaw, "who'd have thought it? This sort of thing disorganises business. Tut! Tut! I expect those accounts she's copying will be chock full of errors. Well, never mind, old chap, give us your hand, I couldn't wish her or you a better bit of luck. By-the-bye, Jack, I'll give you a tip that will set you up in housekeeping; put a hundred in Esperanza Reefs."

"What are they?" said Cousin Jack, opening his paper.

"Not quite sure; here, you follow, give me the *Times*."

Mr. Springle obeyed. Cousin Jack opened the paper, took note of the last quotation of the stock in question, was refolding it casually, his eye caught the leaded line, TERRIBLE DISCOVERY IN LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS. A WOMAN MURDERED. And then a name—a familiar name—"Clare Armitage of Belsize Gardens! Good God!" he cried. "Scrimshaw, read!"

"Yes," said the other, "ghastly affair, wasn't it? Did you know her?"

"Yes, yes! Know her parents too; they died when she was quite a child. My cousin, old George Geldart, who's dead too, now, brought her up in his household. I think she thought young Eric meant to marry her, and I expect he, as was his way with most people, treated her very badly. But, poor soul, who can have done this awful deed?"

TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Phyllis Finds her Father.

On the morning following Frederick Stanyer's return, he and his agent sat in the little room on the second floor in Crosby Square, again conferring.

The conversation mainly turned on market matters, and, not unnaturally, drifted on to liars.

"Talking of liars," said Stanyer, "I met about the biggest specimen just after my arrival out. They were talking about a man of your name, the youngster who made a hit in Parliament, and there was a man in the club just out from home who made himself out to be a sort of walking guide to the Peerage and the County Families, and

(*Continued on page* 509.)

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In connection with the recent statistics published relating to the appalling increase of tuberculosis (lung diseases of all descriptions), consumption, and asthma, Professor Richard Haynel, Director of the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, Burgess Hill, near Brighton, recently waited upon us and gave us some interesting and wonderful information with regard to his treatment for the above-mentioned diseases. The Professor has asked us to inform our readers that he will forward any sufferer mentioning our paper, full and minute details of how "To Cure Yourself," and a copy of his great work on the subject, which deals exhaustively with the Weidhaas Home Treatment, absolutely free of charge. The book sets forth in a very simple language the easiest, most rational, and really marvellous methods for effecting a cure, no matter how long the dreaded disease may have been running its evil way.

Professor Haynel has devoted over twenty-five years consistent study to the question of securing and restoring health to sufferers from consumption, asthma, chest and stomachic complaints. The treatment he advocates has been thoroughly tested during that period, and the number of cases in which it has proved to be remarkably efficacious runs into many thousands. The Professor gave us several instances of remarkable cures, vouched for by letters received from patients, and the following genuine testimonial shown to us, amongst others, is only one record out of hundreds of similar cases of asthma cured to stay cured.

"To the Director of the Weidhaas Institute.—Dear Sir,—It is with grateful and sincere thanks that I testify to the remarkable success of your treatment. For the last seventeen years I have suffered very severely with my chest, and during the winter of '98 I was so ill and weak that I had no hopes of recovery. My cough and expectoration were incessant, and many a night I could not lie down. I was short of breath. My shoulders were bent, and my voice was almost a whisper, whilst I had a severe pain under the shoulder blades. I tried many remedies, so-called, but none cured until I went in for a course of your treatment. Now the pain is all gone, I can walk without feeling tired, and I am never prostrated. In fact, I am in excellent health. I shall do my best to recommend your treatment.—Yours gratefully, Caroline Sadler, Perth, N.B. (Full address on application.)"

At this season of the year, when Bronchitis finds its way into nearly every family in the land, the experience of Mrs. Smith, of Tewkesbury, will be of great interest to our readers. It proves conclusively the undoubted value of a scientific application of hygienic methods in curing disease. "I suffered from chronic bronchitis, and did nothing but cough day and night, with a good deal of phlegm. My lungs were weak and I gradually got worse in spite of the efforts of a doctor. I often had to be assisted up and down stairs, had to struggle for breath and could eat nothing. Attacks would sometimes come on three times a day, and often lasted three weeks. I could never lie down, and dreaded night to come. I was becoming quite a skeleton, and then I decided to try your treatment. In about eleven months I felt quite a new person. Now my breathing is quite perfect, and I am able to do my ordinary housework, including washing. After three long weary years of such helplessness, I feel more than grateful."

Another wonderful cure effected in a long-standing case of consumption, is a further evidence of the efficacy of the Weidhaas Home Treatment. Mrs. Arnold, of Polegate (whose full name and address can be had on application to the Director of the Weidhaas Institute), writes: "'I have suffered several years from consumption, and the doctors gave me up. I was so ill that I was confined to bed, and I lost a half-pint of blood a day. I also suffered from a dry cough and night sweats, and whenever I attempted to do anything I had a fearful pain in my left side. In September, 1897, I was given up as incurable. I suffered dreadfully from bleeding of the lungs, and I could scarcely eat anything. I heard of your cure and made up my mind to try it just at the time when I was at my worst, for I had given up all hopes of ever being cured. After trying your treatment, in a few weeks I began to improve, my cough ceased and I did not suffer from the night sweats or bleeding of the lungs. I can now walk a considerable distance without feeling the least fatigue. I owe my entire cure to your marvellous treatment."

The Professor is quite prepared to back his own opinions and those of his patients to the extent of £1,000, and will pay this sum to any charitable institution we may name, if one testimonial published by the Weidhaas Hygienic Institute can be proved otherwise than genuine. We cannot impress upon our readers who suffer themselves (or whose friends are in distress through these terrible diseases) too much the importance of immediately putting themselves or their friends into communication with the Director of the Institute. You should at once write in full, giving such particulars as you feel justified in stating as to your symptoms and complaints, and you may rest assured that your case, no matter how complicated or serious, will have the prompt personal and individual attention of Professor Haynel.

Address in full, mentioning that we advised you to write—The Weidhaas Hygienic Institute, 80, Burgess Hill, near Brighton.

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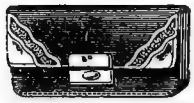

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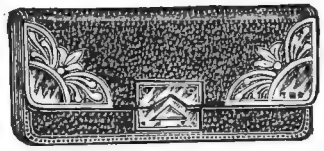

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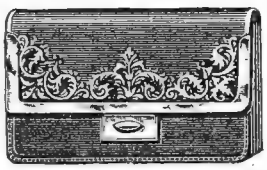

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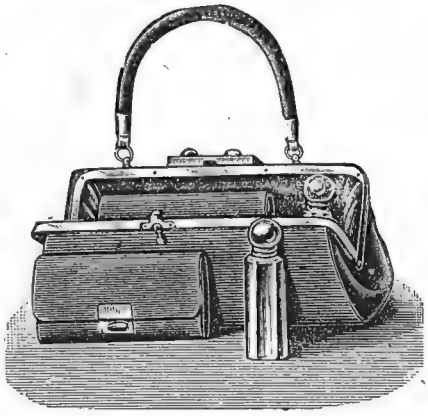

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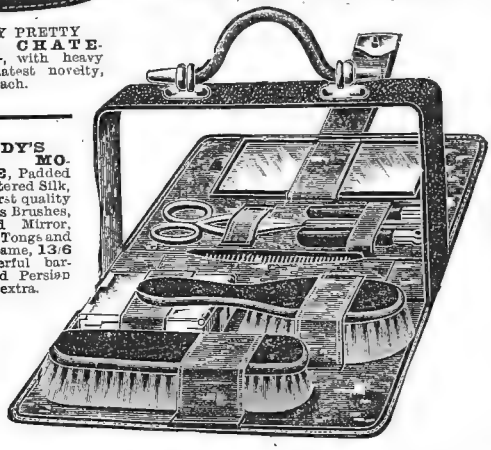

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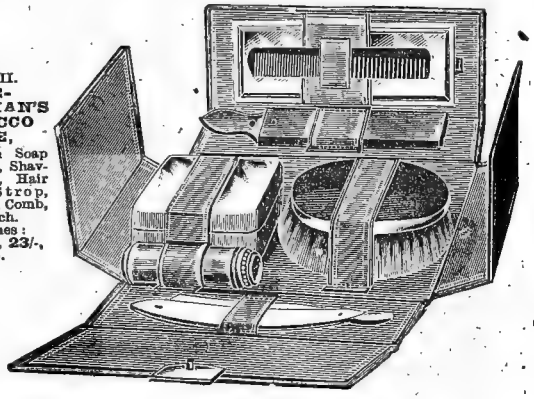

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'Who's Who' rolled into one, and amongst others he professed to know this Eric Geldart, M.P.

"I happened incidentally to mention that I as a lad was in the same office with a man of that name at Berridge and Smilax's in Mincing Lane, and this know-all answered like a shot, 'That's the man; that was Eric Geldart's father.' 'Well,' I said, 'it was very creditable in a young fellow to push his way right through to the front, having regard to his home circumstances,' and, by Jove! the man was down my throat in an instant.

"What was I referring to? Geldart's environment was just about as good a send-off as an ambitious man wanted. Well, I intimated that the man I knew had been rather unfortunate, and when last I met him he was considerably below his bottom dollar. 'Why, man,' says this talking encyclopædia, 'George Geldart was one of the warmest men on the Produce Market!' Said I, 'He may have been, though I should be very surprised to learn it, but when I met him two months ago he was on bed rock, as clean broke as any man could wish to be, and cleaner than most would care to be.'

"This chap curled up his lip and sneered visibly. 'I knew George Geldart very well indeed, dined very many times with him at his house in Bryanston Square, in fact, was there a day or two before he died.' 'Before he what?' said I. 'Died,' says he, and I answered, 'The man I mean is as alive as I am, or anyway he was an hour ago,' for a cablegram from you had been handed me half an hour previously. 'Then,' I added, 'I expect we're talking of different men, the one I mean was the son of Gabriel Geldart, the City alderman, who was in his time Lord Mayor.'

"'Exactly,' my informant replied, 'that was the Geldart I mean; his father articled him with Berridge and Smilax in Mincing Lane before he took him into his own firm. He was at Charterhouse with my own brother. I knew him well; also his two sons, one of whom went to the bad, and was cut adrift, the other is the present M.P. for Little Claverton. Why, I sent flowers to his funeral. My cousin, Dick Farningham, was one of his executors.'

"Well, I held my breath and let him ramble on. Like a good many professional liars, he got hold of one or two facts to weave in the woof of his invention. He described you fairly well, except that he made you out as a kind of type of sleek prosperity, the sort of man you might have been if you'd struck oil before I met you last time I was over here, instead of after.

"Man, he made you out a monument of sleek, snug prosperity and respectability, philanthropist, big donor to all the funds, a governor of this and a director of that, and, observing the direction of my eyes, he suddenly broke off and asked: 'What's the matter with the chandelier?' I said 'Nothing, it was the ceiling I was looking at, expecting it to fall in,' and I waltzed out on the balcony, for that man's lies absorbed all the atmosphere of that room. Hullo! Who's this?" For just then Phyllis Daventry entered the room with a bundle of papers and their typed transcription.

Stanyer followed her with a curious, wistful look in his eyes, then he whispered to Geldart, "Make her talk."

"I think you'll find those all in order," said Phyllis. "Mr. Scrimshaw is late, so I thought I'd bring them straight up to you."

"You're always very good and thoughtful," said Old Mystery. "By-the-bye, Scrimshaw tells me you are going to leave him."

"Yes," said Phyllis, blushing.

"Going to get an easier place?"

"No, Mr. Mystery, that is—well, I hope so, I mean to say," and Phyllis blushed violently. "I'm not going to another post at all, I'm—I'm going to be married and live at Upper Tooting."

"Are you really?" said Old Mystery. "Lucky Upper Tooting, how grey this dreary den will seem without your occasional visits. But who's the happy man?"

"It's Mr. Widdicombe, the *Meteor* manager," said Phyllis, a happier look than ever in her eyes.

Meantime the other man's eyes were fixed with a dilated gaze upon her hand.

"Jack Widdicombe!" exclaimed the old man. "Why my little lassie, he's nearly old enough to be your father. But that's no matter. Love laughs at years as well as locksmiths, and he'll be good and kind."

"Then you know him? I'm so glad! You must come and see us sometimes."

"I don't know, Miss Phyllis."

Stanyer clutched the table.

"But one thing I will do. See here," and he took from his pocket-book a bank-note for £500. "Money may be the root of evil, but sometimes out of evil cometh good. Even gold sometimes brings brightness, and perhaps an old man's gift may make a young woman's home a little happier. I'd like you to buy with this just what you like, and keep it to remember one who always found you gracious, and to whom your gentle words and winning ways brought peace and joy in sad and lonely days."

"Oh, Mr. Mystery!" said Phyllis, "how good you are, but this is quite a fortune, it takes away my breath! I almost wonder if I ought to accept it! It's more money than I ever thought to possess all my whole life; I don't know what to say."

"Tell me, what is your name, little girl, tell me your other name, Phyllis, and say where you got that ring!"

She turned, startled, almost alarmed by the excited tone of the stranger.

"Why, sir," she said, "this ring was my dear dead mother's. Oh! what's the matter?" for the man seemed all of a sudden turned to stone, his eyes dilated, his breath came and went in deep long spasms; he looked upon her like one transfixed.

"Your dear dead mother! Dead—dead!" he faltered; then, strong man as he was he let his head fall on his folded arms and gave way to his grief.

And in answer to the girl's inquiring gaze, Old Mystery said gently:

"This, Phyllis, is my real employer, and my friend, Mr. Frederick Stanyer."

"Stanyer!" exclaimed the girl. "Frederick Stanyer! Why—why that was my father's name!"

"Yes! yes!" said the stricken man, rising to his feet and throwing wide his arms. "Phyllis! Phyllis, at last, my dear, I've found you, come to my heart. I am your father!"

Old Mystery silently stole out of the room, leaving the reunited child and father locked in each other's arms.

He stood a moment irresolute on the staircase. How narrow as well as wide the world was! And then he heard hasty footsteps ascending the stairs and Scrimshaw, with a wild look in his face, bounded up to the landing, a newspaper in his hand.

"Old Mystery!" he cried, "look here, look here!"

And the old man, taking the paper in his trembling hand, read the headline:

THE LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS MURDER!
SENSATIONAL ARREST!

And his eye, roving down the column, caught the name of Clare Armitage.

Clare Armitage, and two other names—those of his own sons.

TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Madeleine Pleads with her Father.

It is doubtful if Eric Geldart, callous and remorseless as we know him to have been, would have been nerved to playing quite the desperate game he pursued but for one consideration, his infatuation for Madeleine Lorraine. And the fever of his passion increased with her coldnesss towards him.

Attractive and delightful as she was, there were plenty in both respects her equal whom the smart, already distinguished young politician might have won for the asking. But for these he had no eyes; it was his way, his heart once set upon an object that was hard to obtain, the more he desired it.

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Had Clare Armitage, whom at one time he thought he loved, been less easy to win he would have prized her more. She, loving him madly and blindly, had thrown herself into his arms, her swift surrender had killed his passion; and, when she stood between the man she loved so dearly and his ends, he took the life that he had blighted without remorse.

But his desire for Madeleine Lorraine had become the ruling passion of his life, therefore a double motive impelled him to his desperate course; the fearful charge against his brother not only tended to his own security, but removed a rival.

Not unnaturally an immense amount of sympathy was accorded him from all sides; even his political opponents deplored the hardships of a young man of such brilliant attainments and promise being subject to a reflected slur.

And when twelve good men and true were summoned by His Majesty's coroner to inquire into the matters touching the death of Clare Armitage, spinster, Eric Geldart, faultless in attire and appearance as his partisans declared him to be in character, faced those twelve good men and true and identified the victim without a trace of emotion.

Not even when he had looked upon that clear, cold, white, set face had he flinched. He looked upon his work, silent and unmoved, touched lightly the ice-cold brow, untroubled.

Yes! even when all of a sudden those around him noted what had not caught their eye before—a stain in the white cerements above the shoulder just where the first cruel blow had fallen. And those who saw marvelled it had not caught their eyes before, while others said the crimson was so vivid it might have been quite new.

The coroner accorded the distinguished witness all the courtesy and respect his position demanded, and the member for Little Claverton gave his evidence, seated beside the representative of the Crown.

Questioned as to whether the deceased to his knowledge had any enemies, he expressed a reluctance to answer that question. But the coroner pressed.

"Mr. Geldart," he said firmly though kindly, "I desire as far as possible in every way to spare your feelings, but in a matter of such serious import as this it is necessary to have, not only the truth and nothing but the truth, but the whole truth."

Then Eric answered that he could only call to mind one person with whom the deceased had been at variance, and when asked who that person was, a thrill of sensation and sympathy followed his reply: "It was my brother, Ronald Geldart."

And he told how when that brother had been charged by their late father with the misappropriation of a large sum of money, the testimony of the deceased had been the most damning against him; told, too, in examination how that brother had disappeared out of his family and social circle, had cut off his environment, and, when next encountered, was bearing an assumed name.

And meantime that brother, a police custodian on either side, watched every movement of Eric's face, listened to his every word. And then the coroner, addressing that selfsame brother, asked:

"Ronald Harvey Geldart, you may, if you choose, give evidence concerning the matters touching this inquiry, only it is my duty to warn you that what you say may be used against you elsewhere."

"I have this to say," Ronald answered. "I met the deceased upon the night in question and I left her alive and well. So far from there being any animus between us she had that night made to me a confession of the share she had taken in as foul a conspiracy against me as ever was laid against a man." Here he faced his brother with a challenge in his eye, but even then there was no flinch in Eric's eyes.

"The story of that conspiracy," said Ronald, "is told in half a dozen words. She, herself under the persuasion, or rather, the coercion of that man—her betrayer—robbed my father, and lied, fixing the crime on me!"

And Eric Geldart, folding his arms, met the accusing gaze with one fully as defiant in its stony impassivity.

As with dogs, it sometimes is with men—give them a bad name you may almost as well hang them. And the jury in this respect did their best by, without leaving the box, returning a verdict of Wilful Murder against Ronald Harvey Geldart.

* * * * *

Lord Lynton lost all patience with his daughter.

"Why, bless my soul, girl!" he rasped out, "you've the chance of a thousand, the man's going up the ladder by leaps and bounds." And then, when the sensational news of the arrest of Harvey Bligh for the Lincoln's Inn Fields murder and the establishment of his identity with Ronald Geldart came out, Viscount Lynton pooh-poohed the idea of the matter affecting Eric.

"The world is too enlightened nowadays," he said, "to let a man suffer for the misdeeds or misfortunes of his kith or kin. Eric Geldart will maintain his position in Society, and his political career will be unchecked, even though his wretched brother goes to the scaffold."

"Oh, no! no! no!" answered Madeleine with a shudder. "They cannot bring this terrible charge home to him."

"That remains to be seen," said her father. "Certainly, as far as circumstantial evidence goes, many a man has been hanged on less."

"But," Madeleine persisted, "Ronald could never strike a woman, still less deal her that dastardly, murderous blow; his nature forbids even such a thought."

The Viscount scanned her curiously, startled at her fervour in the cause of the man accused.

"How do you know?" he asked. "I know that you were present at the arrest, unfortunately, and were, in fact, talking to the wretched fellow when the police arrived; though, happily, so far your name has been kept out of the papers. I was not aware that you were so very intimately acquainted with him, or indeed, that you had ever met him before. Eh?"

Madeleine hung her head.

"Come! Come, tell me, had you ever met him before, and when and where?" He tapped his foot impatiently.

"I have met Ronald Geldart very many times," she answered, now calmly looking him fairly in the face. "Twice he saved my life; once when the horses bolted——"

"What! Was he the fellow who stopped them and was knocked down by them for his pains. I thought that man disappeared without leaving a trace as to his identity."

"So he did; but we met again on the river." And then she told the story of the capsizing of her canoe and her rescue by Ronald.

"But why has all this been kept secret from me?" asked the Viscount, angrily and suspiciously. "Did you ever meet again between that time and the night of the arrest?"

"Yes, very many times."

"Unknown to me?"

"Yes, father. I should have told you, but you and I have lived our lives so very much apart that I hardly thought the matter would interest you."

"Whether it interested me or not, one thing is certain; it would concern me to learn that my daughter was driving and boating with a casual acquaintance of whom she knew little or nothing."

"Oh, but as Harvey Bligh, everybody knew him, answered Madeleine quickly.

"Anyway, I don't consider a scribbling fellow, even though he has acquired a certain kind of mushroom celebrity, a proper acquaintance, certainly not a proper companion for my daughter, and whatever reputation the fellow may have won under an assumed name, he's lost such as he had under the name that was his birthright; his father disinherited him for a thief."

"No! No!" cried Madeleine passionately, "that was a cruel, unjust suspicion, a foul slander it was the work of his life to refute, for he is truth itself."

(To be concluded next week.)

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THE DAILY EXPRESS 1D. ½

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A One Sided Love Affair.

"H. S." is acquainted with a girl who is very fond of him. He feels that he cannot return her love, as he is not fond enough of her. On several occasions she has been quite indifferent to him. The girl herself made the first advances in the acquaintance. How can "H. S." explain his position without causing trouble?

* * * * *

"H. S." should gradually drop his meetings with the girl, and try to cause her to forget him. As long as he continues seeing her, he will exercise a fascination which is difficult to drive away. Above all, he should avoid giving her the impression that he returns her love, as that way lies a broken heart.

Free Trade in Flirtations.

"Last year," writes "G. S.," "I made the acquaintance of a nice boy, who showed me a good deal of attention. I have been for several walks with him, but am told he keeps up the acquaintance of other girls. Shall I speak to him about it, or let the matter drop?"

* * * * *

You must wait until he makes some kind of declaration of love for you, "G. S." before you can dictate to him as to what other girls he sees. He may be merely cultivating your friendship, and can scarcely be expected to drop his other friends on that account. It is not right for a girl to expect a young man, whom she only knows so slightly, to give himself entirely to her.

A Case of Cooling Off.

"A year ago I made the acquaintance of a young lady," writes "Changeable," "of whom I grew very fond. She returned my affection. About two months after our meeting I grew cool to her, and lost my love. Later on I asked her to break off our friendship, which she agreed to do, without being very sorry. I was told, however, that she seemed very cut up about it. She also said she would be always willing to 'make it up again,' but that she could never love me as before. As I still have a certain liking for her would you advise me to attempt a reconciliation?"

* * * * *

I always advise reconciliations between parted friends, and do so in the case of "Changeable." As to whether or not you resume your intimate relations, must depend on how things turn out after your fresh meetings. If you find that you remain cool to each other, then you should agree that the intimacy had better stop. I suppose a man can be on friendly terms with a girl without committing himself to an engagement.

Is It Trespassing?

"R. A. W." writes: "I am in love with a young girl, but, unfortunately, she is already keeping company with a young fellow. As she does not see much of him, I am very often with her, and believe she would certainly go with me if it were not for him. Is it right for me to meet her in the present circumstances? If not, could you advise me what to do?"

* * * * *

Ask the girl herself whether the course is clear for you to meet her, and tell her you do not wish to do anything to disturb her relations with the other fellow. She should be the judge. If she is not actually engaged to him, she must have the right to say whether or not she prefers your society to his.

A Sweetheart's Family.

"Gussie's" sweetheart belongs to a large family. He finds it very difficult to visit her home and to get a few words in private with her. There is always some younger sister or brother to talk to, and her father persists in boring "Gussie" with politics or stocks. How can he act under such circumstances?

* * * * *

It is pretty clear that "Gussie" is not going the right way to work to make a good impression on his sweetheart's family. It is a great blunder in courtship to make out that the girl alone is the only person in the family worthy of notice. This inclines the other members to put the couple down as tedious young turtle-doves. If "Gussie" wishes to be on good terms with the family he should be as nice as possible to young brothers and sisters. They are very good friends in need, as many a young man has found before now. He might, too, talk politics for awhile with her father without doing himself any harm. Fathers, above all, like to think their daughters are engaged to intelligent young men. Besides, "Gussie" should remember that any neglect or slight offered by him to his sweetheart's people would be very galling to her. When a girl has to choose between her sweetheart and her family, it is not always the former that wins the victory.

A Bloodthirsty Sweetheart.

"F. E. W. S." writes: "I am engaged to a girl, but she knows somebody else. When we have any little squabble, she throws the other fellow's name in my face. The other day I told her I should not pay any more money into her club, and that she must pay for her own dresses. She turned on me, punched me in the mouth and chest, and left scratches and bruises on my arm. Her father seems to have no control over her. I have asked her to return my engagement ring, but she refuses to do so until she has found someone more 'suitable.' Can I claim the ring back and break off the engagement without being sued for breach of promise?"

* * * * *

You seem to have got hold of a woman who could not possibly make a desirable wife. As you are engaged to her I cannot advise you to break off the match without her consent. But you can let the engagement slide, and drop all communications with her. As to her returning your ring, you cannot compel that, but it is to be hoped that, when she sees that you have done with her, she will do so. In the event of breach of promise proceedings, I do not think the girl would have a case, if what you tell me about her conduct is true. I hope she will succeed in finding someone more "suitable" for her gentle affections.

Cynthia

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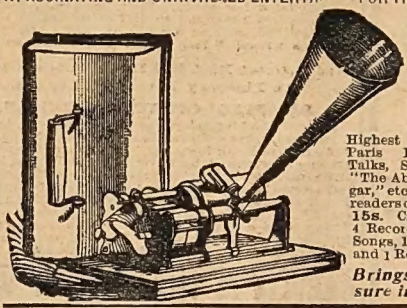

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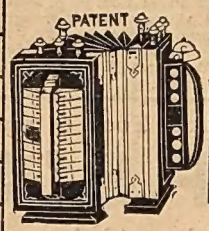

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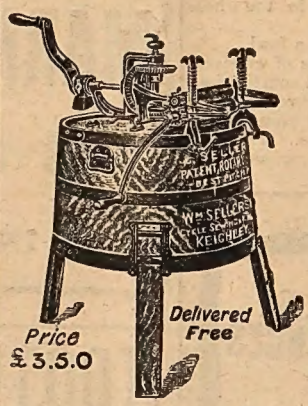

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